





P. o. angl.

471 6

Wood











POMEROY ABBEY

COLLECTION  
OF  
BRITISH AUTHORS  
TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

VOL. 1786.

POMEROY ABBEY BY MRS. HENRY WOOD.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



# TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

By the same Author,

|                                       |         |
|---------------------------------------|---------|
| EAST LYNNE . . . . .                  | 3 vols. |
| THE CHANNINGS . . . . .               | 2 vols. |
| MRS. HALLIBURTON'S TROUBLES . . . . . | 2 vols. |
| VERNER'S PRIDE . . . . .              | 3 vols. |
| THE SHADOW OF ASHLYDYAT . . . . .     | 3 vols. |
| TREVLYN HOLD . . . . .                | 2 vols. |
| LORD OAKBURN'S DAUGHTERS . . . . .    | 2 vols. |
| OSWALD CRAY . . . . .                 | 2 vols. |
| MILDRED ARKELL . . . . .              | 2 vols. |
| ST. MARTIN'S EVE . . . . .            | 2 vols. |
| ELSTER'S FOLLY . . . . .              | 2 vols. |
| LADY ADELAIDE'S OATH . . . . .        | 2 vols. |
| ORVILLE COLLEGE . . . . .             | 1 vol.  |
| A LIFE'S SECRET . . . . .             | 1 vol.  |
| THE RED COURT FARM . . . . .          | 2 vols. |
| ANNE HEREFORD . . . . .               | 2 vols. |
| ROLAND YORKE . . . . .                | 2 vols. |
| GEORGE CANTERBURY'S WILL . . . . .    | 2 vols. |
| BESSY RANE . . . . .                  | 2 vols. |
| DENE HOLLOW . . . . .                 | 2 vols. |
| THE FOGGY NIGHT AT OFFORD . . . . .   | 1 vol.  |
| WITHIN THE MAZE . . . . .             | 2 vols. |
| THE MASTER OF GREYLANDS . . . . .     | 2 vols. |
| TOLD IN THE TWILIGHT . . . . .        | 2 vols. |
| ADAM GRAINGER . . . . .               | 1 vol.  |
| EDINA . . . . .                       | 2 vols. |

---



# POMEROY ABBEY.

A ROMANCE.

BY

MRS. HENRY WOOD,  
AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE," ETC.

*COPYRIGHT EDITION.*

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LEIPZIG  
BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1878.

*The Right of Translation is reserved.*



POMEROY ABBEY

J. BOWMAN



CHRISTIAN LUTHER

12 TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I

LIBRARY

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1875

The Royal Commission of Enquiry



# CONTENTS

## OF VOLUME I.

---

### PART THE FIRST.

|                                             | Page |
|---------------------------------------------|------|
| CHAPTER I. Joan Pomeroy . . . . .           | 7    |
| — II. At the White House . . . . .          | 25   |
| — III. The Keeper's Daughter . . . . .      | 41   |
| — IV. The Death Flag . . . . .              | 56   |
| — V. At the Stile . . . . .                 | 70   |
| — VI. The Lord's Triumph . . . . .          | 85   |
| — VII. The Storm . . . . .                  | 104  |
| — VIII. The Young Lady of Pomeroy . . . . . | 120  |
| — IX. The Prediction . . . . .              | 143  |
| — X. The Quarrel . . . . .                  | 162  |
| — XI. Folly . . . . .                       | 183  |
| — XII. In the Haunted Room . . . . .        | 200  |
| — XIII. The Climax . . . . .                | 214  |
| — XIV. Escaped . . . . .                    | 223  |

### PART THE SECOND.

|                                                  |     |
|--------------------------------------------------|-----|
| CHAPTER I. At the Duchess of St. Ives' . . . . . | 239 |
| — II. Lady Anna . . . . .                        | 260 |
| — III. Guy's Child . . . . .                     | 276 |
| — IV. Startling Visitors . . . . .               | 294 |



# CONTENTS

## PART THE FIRST

|                             |     |
|-----------------------------|-----|
| CHAPTER I. The Introduction | 1   |
| II. The First Chapter       | 15  |
| III. The Second Chapter     | 35  |
| IV. The Third Chapter       | 55  |
| V. The Fourth Chapter       | 75  |
| VI. The Fifth Chapter       | 95  |
| VII. The Sixth Chapter      | 115 |
| VIII. The Seventh Chapter   | 135 |
| IX. The Eighth Chapter      | 155 |
| X. The Ninth Chapter        | 175 |
| XI. The Tenth Chapter       | 195 |
| XII. The Eleventh Chapter   | 215 |
| XIII. The Twelfth Chapter   | 235 |
| XIV. The Thirteenth Chapter | 255 |

## PART THE SECOND

|                             |     |
|-----------------------------|-----|
| CHAPTER I. The Introduction | 275 |
| II. The First Chapter       | 295 |
| III. The Second Chapter     | 315 |
| IV. The Third Chapter       | 335 |



# POMEROY ABBEY.

---

## PART THE FIRST.

### CHAPTER I.

Joan Pomeroy.

NEVER was there a more gloomy structure than that of the old Abbey of Pomeroy, with its grey walls, overgrown in places with lichen and other kinds of moss, its narrow Gothic casements, and its time-worn towers. It was in keeping with the scenery around. Situated on a wild part of the coast of England, it was flanked by bleak and bold rocks on the one side, and a dark forest on the other. Not that the trees were in close proximity to the abbey; they were considerably removed from it, forming, as it were, a background in the distance. The abbey, looking towards the sea, faced the east; and from its front descended a gentle hill, where a few houses, most of them very poor, were honoured with the title of the village, taking its name from their site, "Abbeyland;" for the houses were built on lands pertaining to the abbey. This hill wound round to the right, and led onwards to the dark and gloomy forest. In days gone by, in the time of the Norman kings, this place had been the stronghold of the De Pomeroyes, who were noted war-



riors; then they seemed to have dwindled away and disappeared, and the abbey was for a century or two the abode of a religious order of monks. After that, it had come again into the hands of the Pomeroy, who professed to be lineal descendants of the ancient family, and who in fact were so. They retained their original faith, that of Roman Catholic, but they dropped the "de" before the name. The reigning head and chief of the abbey was called the Lord of Pomeroy; a privilege bestowed upon the family, according to popular belief, by one of our Norman kings.

But the Pomeroy themselves accounted for it in a different manner. Tradition ran—and they and others believed it to be true—that the portion of land on which the abbey and its demesnes were situated had once been an island—the Island of Pomeroy. On this the Pomeroy had held sway as kings; had been its absolute lords; and had hence derived their title, the Lords of Pomeroy. Since then, ages ago, the sea had retreated and the island became merged in the main land; but they still retained their distinctive title, and were likely to retain it. The reader of course understands that it was no lawful title; it was merely conceded in courtesy, somewhat as a landed proprietor in Scotland is styled the laird. Nothing could shake their own faith that they had as much right to it as has the premier duke of England to his dukedom.

The abbey was built in the form of a quadrangle; a solid square stone building with a turret at each corner. The entrance gates, of massive iron, stood in the middle of the front, or east pile. Entering these gates, and passing their dark, spacious archway, to the square opening that lay in the midst of the building,



we see how large it is. Each side contains rooms enough for a numerous household. Standing with our faces to the entrance gates, the chief, or east pile lies before us, and its corner turret to our left hand as we stand, is called the East Tower. The north wing lies between the east and the north towers; the west wing lies between the north and the west towers (which west wing forms the back of the structure); and the south wing, lying to our right between the west and south towers, brings us back to the front and starting point. Of these various piles, or sides, or wings, as you may please to call them, only the front and the north are inhabited at present, though all (save the west) are furnished for occupation in a greater or lesser degree. The rooms in the west wing, and more particularly those in the west tower, have the reputation of being haunted; and for a long time past no one has lived in them. It should also be said that this west wing, though apparently looking as large as the other wings to us who stand in the open quadrangle below, is a very deceptive wing. For it is not half the width of the other wings; and the rooms, instead of being numerous, are few, and all of them look out upon the abbey itself, and the quadrangle it encloses, there being no windows whatever at the back. As to the quadrangle, with its grassy flooring, if that term may be allowed, it looks exactly like a gloomy grave-yard enclosed by cloisters. All round the quadrangle, between the abbey and the grass, lie roofed cloisters supported by pillars; their casements are unglazed, open to the quadrangle; doors lead from them into the quadrangle in places, as they do from the cloisters into the house.



If there were a window looking out to the back in the west wing, and we could take our stand at it, we should look upon a wide expanse of wood and dale. To the right, as we are supposing that we look, lies the chapel, surmounted by its quaint cross, and the grave-yard beside it. Near the grave-yard is the little house inhabited by the priest, Father Andrew, who shrives the abbey and the village and the neighbourhood in general, for nearly everybody is of the old faith. Beyond are the stables and coach-houses. Some miles further off may be seen the chimneys of a large building rising against the horizon; they belong to a convent. It has existed for centuries, having been spared the destruction which so many other religious communities underwent in troublous times, though a portion of it once had to be rebuilt after a fire. It is of a rigid order, and is an educational establishment as well as a convent. A few houses nestling within their own grounds may be observed, scattered here and there in the distance: some good Catholic families inhabit them, drawn to the neighbourhood originally by the convent, by the far-famed abbey and its strictly Roman Catholic owners.

Rather to our left, and very near the abbey, stands a small, round stone building, grey and old; it is covered with moss like the abbey, and is called the keep. A slope of green grass descends from it somewhat abruptly to a low level dell; and then the ground gently rises again to the abbey walls. At present this keep is vacant; but it has sometimes been inhabited by one or other faithful retainer of the family when he has grown too old for service; it is said that the present lord intends his own man, Jerome, to retire to it



later. On this west side the abbey has no entrance whatever. Neither has the south side any outer entrance; if you want to enter you must travel round to the front gates. On the north side lie the garden and grounds, which are extensive.

Hugh, Lord of Pomeroy, the present chief and head of the family, had two daughters and four sons: Guy, Rupert, George, and Leolin; Guy of course being the heir. George, Captain Pomeroy, was with his regiment in Ireland, though he had recently been sojourning at the abbey; in fact, as his father told him, he seemed to be always getting leave of absence and coming home. Leolin was on the continent, being an attaché at one of our embassies there. Guy and Rupert were at home; neither had any profession or calling. Guy was the heir; and Rupert had come into a fair fortune when he was of age, bequeathed to him by his mother, because he was the second son, though it was well-known that her favourite son was the third, George. The rest thought it very unfair that Rupert should have this money, Guy especially; but the Lady of Pomeroy had so left it in her will, and nothing could be done about it after her death. It might have been just as well that Rupert had not inherited the bequest. He had hastened to London, to Paris, and to other gay places, spending the money right and left. When it was all gone, and more to it, for which he was in debt thick and threefold, back he came to the abbey and took up his abode in it. That was a twelvemonth ago, and here he was still.

Guy and Rupert Pomeroy were remarkably tall, fine men, just of a height, nearly six feet three, and alike in figure. They had both the high, handsome features



of the Pomeroy, the bright brown hair, and the deep-grey eyes: but there the resemblance apparently ended. Guy was of a pale complexion, almost ghastly; his features, in themselves as well formed as Rupert's, were rendered plain by their exceedingly stern expression, and by his possessing what is called a hare-lip, all efforts to close which had failed in infancy. Rupert's complexion was more fresh and beautiful than is often owned by man, the expression of his face was winning, though somewhat free, and his mouth was one of great sweetness. In voice also they differed: Guy's being deep and harsh, Rupert's pleasant as music.

It was a bright summer morning, and the cloth for breakfast was laid in the usual room; a small apartment on the first floor, that looked to the front of the abbey. Many of the rooms on the ground floor were given over to the servants: and the windows of all were protected outside by cross-bars of iron. Standing at the narrow open casement of this breakfast-room, while waiting for her father and brothers, was Miss Pomeroy, gazing out upon the old familiar features, which she had not seen so long: the rocks, the straggling village, and a large white house nearly hidden by trees, which lay half way up the hill beyond. She had returned home the previous evening from an absence of eight months. Some years ago her sister Isabel had married the Honourable Henry Capel, and had already more children than she cared to count. Joan often went to stay with her, but had never remained away so long before. She had been named Joan after a certain Dame Joan de Pomeroy, famous for her beauty in the reign of King John. Poor Joan—this Joan—was plain, tall, and angular, her hair very dark, and her com-



plexion nearly olive; but her features were good. She was twenty-nine this year; her sister Isabel, the eldest of the family, being one year older. Rupert entered.

"What are you looking at, Joan?"

"Not at anything in particular. Just then I was watching the smoke curling up from the White House. How do you get on with its inmates, Rupert? Have you become intimate with them?"

"Guy has."

"Guy!"

"He and the lord are there often. Indeed, I began to think that we were going to be presented, gratis, with a lady-in-law——"

"Rupert!" interrupted Joan, in a tone of rebuke.

"Or step-lady—how runs it?" continued the unmoved Rupert. "Until I found that the play lay in a different direction. The lord and Mrs. Wylde were but courting for their children."

Joan drew up her head. "As if papa would condescend to anything of the kind, Rupert! Tell me what you mean."

"The son-and-heir is to settle," cried Rupert; "so runs the programme; and——"

"Guy cannot afford it. You have all been too extravagant for him to think of marrying; papa has often told him so. Two households in the abbey would double the present cost."

"I should like to have a guinea for every superfluous word you drop in a day, Joan," laughed Rupert Pomeroy, who was the essence of good temper. "Guy will afford an establishment——if he gets the young lady. She has five-and-twenty thousand pounds—to be paid down on her wedding-day."



"Are you speaking of the mother or the daughter?"

"Well done, Joan! The mother is double Guy's age—or getting on for it. I said on the wedding-day."

"But—will—she, the daughter, have Guy?" slowly and doubtfully ejaculated Miss Pomeroy.

Rupert opened another of the narrow casements, and put his head out. He whistled to one of his pointers, which was frolicking below with the game-keeper, Gaunt.

"Rupert! Rupert!" exclaimed his sister, petulantly, "you know when I want to hear a thing I must hear it. I say, will Alice Wylde accept Guy?"

Rupert drew in his head. "You had better ask that of Guy himself."

"Is it true that she will have so large a sum?"

"That's true. Her father was in India: a nabob—or rajah—or merchant—something they make fortunes at, out there: and she inherits. There'll be another twenty-five thousand when her mother dies: or more."

"She will never have Guy: she is too beautiful."

"Pretty women often marry ugly men, and——hush!" broke off Rupert: "here he comes, the son-and-heir."

Guy Pomeroy was heard outside, talking. His temper had made him not loved by his brothers and sisters, over whom he assumed too much authority. But the lord doted on him. In Guy he saw his son-and-heir: and his constant allusions to Guy's being such, had caused the rest to apply the term to Guy derisively. Haughty, arrogant, and fearful spendthrifts, the Pomeroyes, from the lord downwards, had outrun their income; but this was not known to the world;



and Guy, between whom and his father there existed entire confidence, had reached the age of eight-and-twenty without thought of marrying. "You must wait until I'm gone, Guy," the lord sometimes said to him; "you'll have the whole then." While things were in this state, the White House changed its tenants, and became inhabited by the rich widow and daughter of Mr. Wylde.

But not for the sake of her fortune did Guy Pomeroy think of sacrificing his liberty: that the money may have added weight to the inducement, was probable, but the fresh beauty of Alice Wylde had caught his eye and heart. When those cold-natured men, such as Guy, do love, they love passionately: and, with an impassioned fervour that is not often equalled, had Guy Pomeroy learnt to love Alice Wylde. Rupert did not explain this to his sister; he parried her questions, and seemed to treat the whole as a joke to be laughed at.

"I hear George has been at home again," she resumed.

"George? Yes, he came soon after you left home, I think; he stayed for some months."

"I wonder he likes to idle away so much of his time—and I wonder he gets the leave to do it," remarked Joan. "He cannot find much amusement here, I should think. But George was always idly inclined, and down here he is of course relieved from duty."

As she spoke, Guy Pomeroy entered. Joan went up to him and they kissed each other: they had not previously met since her return. Guy took his seat at the breakfast-table, and motioned to her to do the same.

"Guy," she began, as she obeyed him, with little



regard to his feelings or to her own good manners, "Rupert says you wish to marry Miss Wylde. Will she have you?"

A hot flush illumined Guy's white cheek; proving, of itself, how very deep his love had gone. He drew himself up haughtily.

"Let Rupert concern himself with his fishing and his shooting, and his other—more questionable—sports: but let him not concern himself with me."

He rang the bell as he spoke; Rupert, still looking from the casement, appeared not to hear. Jerome came in, the lord's personal attendant; a faithful serving-man over fifty years old.

"The lord breakfasts in his room," said Guy.

"Yes, sir, I know it," replied Jerome. "He has slept badly."

Joan was busy with the breakfast-table. She could not domineer over Guy, as she did over Rupert: not that the latter heeded her domineering, for he was good-tempered and careless. Once, when Guy had declined to tell her something she wished to know, and she had teased him to anger, he struck her. She said no more now about Alice Wylde, but let the conversation drift to general subjects, and the breakfast passed in peace.

The meal over, she went up to her father. A grand, tall old man, with a grey, handsome face, and grey hair. Now that Joan saw him by daylight, she noticed how ill and worn he looked. He was slowly eating his breakfast at a small round table drawn to the fire in his own sitting-room.

"Papa, you don't look well."



"No? I can't get over that last attack of mine, child."

"And you have a fire! It is a very warm day."

"I never feel warm now. There, let my ailments alone, Joan. Talk of something else."

"Papa, is Guy to marry Alice Wylde?"

The lord looked up. "Who has made you so wise?"

"Rupert."

"It is no business of Rupert's."

"Papa, I do not suppose she would have Guy."

"Not have Guy! I can tell you that an alliance with the future Lord of Pomeroy is what many a young lady, far higher in position and lineage than she, would kneel for. She and Mrs. Wylde see it in the right light, and are eager for it. Do you think that so strange a thing, Joan?"

"Well, papa, you know that Guy is stern of manner, and not much liked in general. And one so rich and beautiful as Miss Wylde can choose as she will."

"But Guy will be Lord of Pomeroy. To be his wife is what a daughter of the highest noble in the land might covet. And Guy will make a good husband—unless I am mistaken. At any rate, Joan, the matter lies entirely with himself and Miss Wylde: it is not seemly that you should thus comment upon it."

"I'm sure, papa, I wish Guy every happiness," replied Joan, her eyes filling at the reproof. "If he and Miss Wylde like one another, I could desire nothing better."

"Guy likes her; be very sure of that. And, if Mrs. Wylde is to be believed, the daughter likes him. And



now you may leave me, my dear: I'm expecting Father Andrew."

As Joan went out of the room, she met him. He wore his priestly garments, by which Joan knew that he was going in for some office of religion. Father Andrew's face, a pleasant, rubicund face at all times, brightened at the sight of her. He was a stout man, of middle height, and of some five-and-forty years.

"Welcome home, my child. We have been dull without you."

"Father," she whispered, after responding to his greeting, "do you think papa is seriously ill? He looks so changed."

"He is weaker than I like to see him; that's a fact. But the last fit of gout was a sharp one, and tried him terribly."

"But that was three months ago."

"True. Still, he has never seemed quite the same since. And he is not cautious enough as to what he takes. Poor living does not suit the taste of the Pomeroy's. However, let us hope that he will get up his strength shortly."

Father Andrew passed into the lord's room, and Joan went about her business in the abbey. Visiting the housekeeper, Mrs. Rex, and other of the upper servants, and superintending the putting away of her own wardrobe—which she liked to do, rather than leave it entirely to her maid. What with one thing and another, she was pretty busy until luncheon-time. Early in the afternoon, she called Bridget—who was the house-keeper's niece and a favourite servant.

"I want you to go as far as the lodge," she said.



"Tell Sybilla—tell Miss Gaunt that I am at home; though I daresay she has heard it. Give my love to her and ask her to come up to see me."

Away went Bridget on her errand. She was soon back again; for the gamekeeper's lodge was only just beyond the village.

"Miss Gaunt's kind love and duty to you, Miss Joan; but she has one of her bad headaches this afternoon, and is not able to wait on you," was the message Bridget brought. And Joan Pomeroy's usually placid features took a momentary cross expression—for she liked Sybilla Gaunt and was fond of her occasional companionship.

The family dined alone. Not in the great dining-hall below, but with all the usual state and ceremony pertaining to the Pomeroy's. The lord headed his table and Joan faced him; Guy and Rupert being on either side. To be alone at dinner was rather an unusual circumstance; for the abbey was fond of guests, though it might be but Father Andrew. But the lord was losing his energy, and of late seemed not to care how much he was left in quiet. With the removal of the cloth, Joan quitted the room. Rupert followed her, and strolled out. Guy remained with his father.

"Where have you been all the afternoon?" demanded the lord. "At the White House?"

"I called there," replied Guy.

"When do you mean to bring matters to a close? It seems to me that you are holding off unaccountably. Speak to her off-hand, Guy, and don't be afraid. I never knew that a Pomeroy could be scared by a woman."

Guy Pomeroy's livid face turned scarlet; a far



deeper scarlet than that called up by Joan's bold question in the morning. If the proud old chief could but have known its cause!

"There is plenty of time," replied Guy, evasively.

"As you please, Guy. I thought your heart was set upon the match. I'm sure I don't wish to urge it if you don't."

"Time enough," muttered Guy. "Father drink claret; so much port is not good for you."

"I hate claret," said the lord; "not a drop should be on my table, but for fashion's sake. I never could get used to it as a young man, and I can't as an old one. In my day, Guy, the creed was to despise everything French."

"But think of the gout, sir. Jerome is fearing another attack."

"Jerome would fear his own shadow," replied the Lord of Pomeroy.

Meanwhile, Rupert strolled leisurely along, just as though he had no object in life save to look about him; but when he was beyond view of the abbey, he mended his pace, and went as if he were walking for a wager. It was a lovely summer's evening, and the setting sun threw its golden light athwart the heavy trees in the distance. Crossing some fields, by a sheltered path, he emerged from them at the back of the White House, and entered its garden by a small door.

Not to the open part of it: no, Rupert Pomeroy dared not do that, lest he should encounter the lynx eyes of Mrs. Wylde. He kept amidst the clump of shrubs that skirted the wall, and peeped out beyond them to see what was to be seen.



He saw a bright, radiant-looking girl, her dark brown hair shining in the sunbeams, and her cheeks damask with expectation. She was in an evening dress of white, and wore a small thin gold chain round her neck, and similar bracelets on her arms; and she was flitting from bed to bed, plucking a flower from one, stooping to inhale the scent of another, and—drawing farther from the windows of the house: drawing, as if unconsciously, and without any apparent design. Just in the same manner, you observe, that Mr. Rupert Pomeroy had drawn away from the abbey.

Rupert Pomeroy, talking with his sister, had said the late Mr. Wylde had been something in India—a nabob, or rajah, or merchant—something at which people made fortunes. In point of fact, Mr. Wylde had not been any one of the three: he had been a railway contractor. The greater portion of his fortune was made at home: though he did go out to India, and died there. Of his large fortune, twenty-five thousand pounds were left to his daughter, to be paid to her on her marriage; and the rest (which was something like another twenty-five thousand doubled) would be hers on the death of his wife.

Mrs. Wylde and Alice came home from India—having accompanied Mr. Wylde thither—conscious of possessing more riches than they well knew how to count. The contractor had been a close man as to his means, and the wife had never supposed that he was worth a tithe of what those means turned out to be. Being so wealthy, it was of course incumbent on the widow to set up her tent accordingly; so she looked out for some pleasant locality where Roman Catholics congregated—for the Wylde family were of that persuasion.



—and was directed to Abbeyland. Mrs. Wylde took upon long lease the White House, which belonged to the Pomeroy, and settled down in it.

They were very pleasant people, this widow and daughter; the latter was also lovely; and Guy and Rupert Pomeroy called upon and paid court to their new tenants. Rumours of the girl's great wealth got about, and the Lord of Pomeroy began to pay them attention himself. Guy's heart, hitherto invulnerable, fell before the charms of the young lady; the lord read the signs, and favoured the project. He was a proud old man, and the Wylde were nobodies; but money was wanted at Pomeroy, and he put the riches against the lack of descent. "One can't have everything nowadays," he remarked to Guy.

The lord, when speaking to Joan, had used the right term with regard to Mrs. Wylde—she was "eager" for the match. Mrs. Wylde's husband had not much to boast of in the way of descent: she had as little; was, in short, of no "descent" whatever. As a matter of course—at least, it is a matter of course with many such people—she was most inordinately alive to the advantages of rank. Her own turn was over; she could not be other than she was; but to see Alice wed into a noble family was her first earthly ambition: and when the Heir of Pomeroy permitted himself to show indication that he was paying court to Alice, her exultation knew no bounds. Once let Alice become his wife, and Mrs. Wylde would fold her hands in contentment and sit down upon her laurels for life.

What though Guy Pomeroy was stern of mien and plain of face?—as Alice remonstrated. "Look at him from a little distance," said Mrs. Wylde, "and where



else would you find so handsome a form, so noble a man?—it was only when you were close to him that you perceived his lip had a little defect in it, and his face was somewhat pale.”

“Yes,” answered Alice again, “but wives do not look at husbands from a distance; they pass their days close to them.”

However, she might have been tempted to take Guy, for she was just as great a worshipper of rank as her mother, and no doubt would have taken him, but for one unfortunate circumstance—she had fallen in love with his brother Rupert.

And Mrs. Wylde saw nothing of the mischief until it was done. We rarely suspect the treason that goes on under our very eyes. Rupert and Guy were alike equally welcomed to the White House: metaphorically, Mrs. Wylde worshipped anybody bearing the name of Pomeroy. Rupert and Alice had plenty of time and opportunity given them to fall in love with one another.

But suddenly, without the slightest warning, Mrs. Wylde saw something one day, or thought she saw it, that she did not approve of—something like a private understanding between her daughter and Rupert: and a faint and very disagreeable suspicion dawned upon her that Alice might be getting to enjoy the society of the handsome Rupert more than that of Guy. Alice made a joke of her mother’s “fancy,” as she called it, denying it utterly; and Mrs. Wylde was fain to be appeased. But the incident taught her caution: and from that hour Rupert Pomeroy’s visits to the house were discouraged. Call when he would, he could not



get admittance: the ladies were out, or the ladies were engaged.

Alice Wylde had not been well trained. Anything but that. Whether she was by nature self-willed and deceitful, or whether present circumstances were imparting those qualities to her, cannot be known. Vain to a fault, was she; passionately fond of admiration; and, with it all, a perfect coquette.

Nearly from the very first she had detected the Heir of Pomeroy's serious feeling for her. It gratified her beyond everything. *She drew him on*; flirting, laughing, talking; playing off her pretty airs and graces upon him. It may be, that she did not know what she was doing—what drawing him on to; it may be, that she deemed his feelings might be shallow as her own—if, indeed, hers were shallow—and that if his wings did get a little singed in the radiant light of her presence, they would soon heal again. It may be, too, that she changed her tactics in a degree as the love grew between her and Rupert; and that if she did not absolutely repress Guy, she did not continue to give him encouragement.

The Lord of Pomeroy spoke a word of reproach to his son Guy at the dinner-table, for not pursuing more ardently his suit with Miss Wylde. Guy's face had flushed hot with emotion, and Guy had turned the subject off. He had cause to do both.

That very afternoon Guy Pomeroy had staked his die and lost it: he had offered himself to Alice Wylde, and been refused.

"You must accept me; you have led me to think that you would," pleaded Guy, in his shock of surprise. "I love you too passionately to lose you."



But Alice only said he was mistaken, and rejected him utterly. She gave him no hope whatever; on the contrary, she forbade him to think of hope, then or ever. And the Heir of Pomeroy left the house a mortified and (so far as his hopes went) a crushed man.

## CHAPTER II.

At the White House.

MRS. WYLDE chanced to be from home during the visit of Guy Pomeroy, just spoken of, and knew nothing of what had transpired; neither was it disclosed to her, then or later. Her carriage drove in late, close upon the dinner-hour; she hastened to dress, and then joined her daughter in the drawing-room.

"Does Mr. Pomeroy dine here?" enquired Mrs. Wylde, who was a little, fair woman, with cold light eyes and very light hair, and wore this evening a maize-coloured net dress with Indian ornaments.

"No, mamma."

"But I told you, Alice, to invite him if he called."

"I really forget whether I asked him or not," said Alice, indifferently. "I fancy I did not."

"You appear to be growing very forgetful of late," returned Mrs. Wylde. "Dinner, Cannel? That's right: I am fearfully hungry."

Mrs. Wylde liked her dinner: there was always a good one at the White House, whether on feast days or meagre days: and her vexation at Alice's indifference and at the absence of Guy Pomeroy was soon forgotten. She began talking of the law-business which had called her to the distant county town.



"Miss Pomeroy is come home," observed Alice.

"Is she? When did she come?"

"Last night, I think he said."

"Who said?"

"Mr. Pomeroy."

"We will go over to-morrow and see her."

Dinner over, and dessert begun, Alice took a little fruit; and then, quitting the table without ceremony or apology, passed out at the glass doors, which stood open to the warm air and setting sun. You have already seen her: for this was spoken of before: in her white dress, with the gold circlets on her neck and arms, and the damask colour of expectation on her cheeks.

"Alice," called out Mrs. Wylde, "I wish you would put a scarf over your shoulders, and take a parasol. You generally choose this hour for loitering in the garden, when the sun is full upon it."

"Mamma, I shall not take cold."

"I don't suppose you will. I was not thinking of cold: but you will tan your neck. The hot sun of summer tans as much at its setting as at mid-day."

Alice Wylde folded her lace pocket-handkerchief, and threw it over her neck.

"You have not taken your wine," pursued Mrs. Wylde.

"I don't want it, mamma. I took some at dinner."

Alice buried her face in a rose-tree as she spoke, inhaling its perfume. Mrs. Wylde took the glass of port wine which she had poured out for Alice, and drank it herself. Mrs. Wylde thought it wrong to waste good wine, and she was fond of port: the chief after-dinner wine of those days. She liked to take two or



three glasses of it after dinner, and then to fall, when alone, into a comfortable doze. Thus, on these favourable opportunities, as Alice considered them, on these evenings when they were not on ceremony, Alice got an hour to herself to linger in the garden, to look at the rising moon, and listen to the nightingales.

Well for her—oh, more than well, if she had seen and listened to nothing else! Strolling from flower to flower, she drew gradually away from the house, turned the grove of shrubs and trees, and was lost to sight. Mrs. Wylde had forgotten her then, and was deep in rose-coloured visions of that desirable time when she should shoot up a few feet on the world's pinnacle, as the mother of the Lady of Pomeroy.

Amidst the friendly, sheltering trees stood Rupert. Opening his arms he drew Alice to him. "My dearest!"

"Oh, Rupert, I thought this evening would never come! I have so wanted to see you, and—and—tell you something. That is, if it would not be wrong to do it. I hardly know."

"Wrong to do it—to tell me anything!" he returned. "What can you know, Alice, that you may not share with me?"

"I will tell you; yes, I will: but you must never never let it transpire that you do know it. It would be cruel to him."

"To whom?"

"Guy. He came this afternoon to ask me to be his wife."

Rupert received the news with equanimity: perhaps the young lady had thought he would be moved by it. "Well?" said he, "what was your answer?"



"I told him I was sorry, but that I did not love him, and it was of no use his asking me to."

Rupert laughed. His arm was round her waist. "What did Guy say to that?"

"I hardly know what he said. My mind was in a whirl and I did not catch his words—only their sense. He said he loved me as no other man had loved woman, for his passions were vehement within him, and it was I alone who had ever called them forth."

"You might have told him that *one* other, at any rate, loved you as passionately as he."

"He then spoke about being Guy Pomeroy of Pomeroy, and——"

Rupert threw back his head. "That's Guy all over. Of course he is that: but he need not enlarge upon it. How did it end?"

"He would not take my refusal. He did not seem to believe in it. He said young ladies rarely knew their own minds; that I had had no experience; and that he should never give me up while he had life. But I think, for all that, he did believe me, Rupert."

"Of course he did. You must keep him at a distance now."

"He said he should come to the White House as usual, and he hoped that I should in a few weeks grant him a different answer."

"And pray what did you say to that?"

"Nothing. Except that if he did continue to come he must consider himself entirely mamma's visitor, not mine."

Rupert bent his face until his cheek touched hers while he whispered his sweet vows of love. She resisted not: for, passionately as Guy Pomeroy loved



Alice, did she in her turn love Rupert. Whether Mr. Rupert's affection was very ardent is doubtful: he had paid such vows many a time before. Rupert Pomeroy was a general admirer of pretty women; and it often happens that those general admirers are not capable of that one pure, ardent passion which can stir man's heart but once. He loved Alice Wylde in his own fashion; quite sufficiently so to make her his wife. He hoped she would be his wife; though he did not see his way clear to make her so at present; for Mrs. Wylde would be dead against him, and so would be the Lord of Pomeroy. The lord favoured Guy's suit, he would but resent his, Rupert's; the lord wanted Guy to be happy and rich. Guy, if he must marry, needed money with his wife: but Guy did not need money half as much as did Rupert.

Rupert drew her arm within his, and they paced the narrow sheltered walk. Alice took courage to ask Rupert what his future prospects were. Rupert replied vaguely. They did not appear to be at all tangible: but he was of a sanguine spirit, and talked glowingly, as one does talk who means to set the Thames on fire. Thus the time passed, all too swiftly for them. Wrapt in the magic of each other's presence, in the melody of love's golden chords, they saw not how swiftly the light was fading; and the sun had set, and the evening star shone in the heavens, when Alice awoke to reality.

"Oh Rupert! see how late it is! What a long while we must have been walking here! What will mamma say?"

"Nothing. Your mamma is yet in her after-dinner nap."



"I don't know that. I have never stayed so late as this."

"You have had more to tell me than you ever had before."

"To tell you?"

"Guy's presumption. Well, we must check-mate him; though it may take time to do it. Fare you well for to-night, my best and dearest."

Alice stole back to the house, not by the open lawn, but by a side path, her heart living over again the stolen interview, her cheeks crimson with the pressure of Rupert's lips.

"Tiresome old creature!—he's always doing it."

Now the words, fretfully spoken, did not apply to him who was filling her thoughts, Rupert Pomeroy, but to that worthy man, Cannet, the butler. Alice had made her way to a convenient side-door, and found it fastened. It chanced, however, that Cannet was close by at the moment she tried it; he unbolted it and threw it open.

"I never saw any one like you in my life, Cannet!—bolting and barring the doors at this hour, as if you feared we were going to be robbed! An evening or two ago, in the broad sunshine, I tried this door and found it locked."

"I'm very sorry, Miss Alice. But there's a lot of tramps about; there always is in hot weather, and it's right to be cautious."

"As if tramps would come now! They would let it get dark first."

Cannet knew that the twilight hour was just the one favoured by tramps; but he did not say so. Alice went into the drawing-room; played softly for a minute



or two, and then crossed the hall to the dining-room—startling her mother from her doze. The long drive had tired Mrs. Wylde.

“Why, mamma, what a sleep you are taking!”

“Am I! What’s the time? Dear me, why it is getting dusk. Why did you not wake me before, Alice? Where have you been?”

“I came here from the piano—wondering what had become of you.”

Mrs. Wylde rang the bell, and then quitted the room with her daughter. Alice sat down again to the piano, and the tea came in.

And poor Mrs. Wylde, stirring and tasting the tea, had no more notion of the treason that had been enacted, than you have that you are going to be made a duke to-morrow, my good reader. Ah, girls think themselves very clever, those who can act thus; but let them be assured that a day of reckoning must come. Alice Wylde saw no harm in deceiving her mother, or in the deceit itself—but that same day of reckoning might be laying up its vengeance even for her.

Mrs. Wylde, having attained a position in the great world, of course deemed it necessary to borrow its manners and customs. Time was, not so very long ago either, when she saw no necessity to keep a maid for her personal service; but now she kept two maids, one for herself, and the other for her daughter. As Alice went into her room this night, the latter was waiting for her as usual. She was a respectable looking, plain-dressing woman of thirty; her hair, already slightly grey, was braided over her forehead; her face was thoughtful and sensible. In the earlier days this girl had been the housemaid. She was good and



faithful; and of their own religion. Mrs. Wylde took her to India, and afterwards she became Alice's attendant, of whom she was very fond.

"What's the matter, Theresa?" asked Alice: for the servant had her cheek bent upon her hands. "Is your tooth aching again? Why don't you go to the town and have it taken out?"

"And so I would," said Theresa, "if I were sure it was the tooth. I think it is—what's that fine new name?—neuralgia."

Alice laughed. "Neuralgia is as old as I am, Theresa."

"Well, miss, we have always said rheumatism. That was fine enough for us. Shall I begin your hair, Miss Alice?"

Alice was standing at the open window, gazing outwards. The moon was riding in the sky, the few stars that were out twinkled in their course: beneath, lay the grass-plot and the sweet flowers, and beyond rose the grove that had sheltered her and Rupert. Lost in memory, Alice stood on, oblivious of there being any such duties as undressing. Theresa waited, mentally debating whether she should speak of a certain matter that was troubling her, or whether she should not.

"Mamma's as tired as she can be," began Alice, her thoughts wandering to her mother. "It is a long drive; and she says she felt quite weary with the deeds the lawyer had to read to her."

"It is a good long way to Owlstone, Miss Alice,—there and back."

"Mamma slept till tea-time, and then was angry with me for not awaking her. I was in the garden,



And what a stupid thing that Cannel is!—locking all the doors by daylight!”

Now it seemed to Theresa—who was reflective, conscientious, and a little given to be swayed by signs and symptoms—that her young mistress must have unconsciously opened out this very subject on purpose to afford her an excuse for speaking: and she seized upon it. Walking nearer to the window, she began in a low tone.

“I saw you there, Miss Alice.”

“Saw me—where?” returned Alice, rather sharply.

“Out yonder, Miss Alice: down by the grove. Mr. Rupert Pomeroy was with you.”

Alice was silent. This avowal was very awkward.

“*How* could you have seen me?” she presently asked, the question occurring to her. “Where were you, Theresa?”

“I went to the herb-bed: some of them downstairs said that a fomentation of hot sage-leaves to my cheek would ease the pain: and this,” nodding at the broad gravel path beneath, “is the nearest way, so I took the liberty of taking it. I saw you as I turned the corner, Miss Alice; you stood with your backs to me, both you and Mr. Rupert. He had his arm round your waist.”

“Dear me, had he?”—after a rather dismayed pause. “He is very thoughtless. We were talking about something or other, I suppose. But now, Theresa, don’t you go telling this to mamma.”

“Miss Alice,” said the woman, gravely, “I came to your papa’s house when you were but a little girl, and there was but two servants in all; and I have watched



you grow up, and I have got fonder of you and prouder of you year by year. But, oh, my dear young lady—and for the reason I've just given, perhaps you'll let me say it—it is not right to be so familiar with Mr. Rupert when you are to marry Mr. Pomeroy."

"You stupid thing, Theresa! Who told you, pray, that I was to marry Mr. Pomeroy?"

"My mistress told me."

"Just like mamma!—fancying a thing must come to pass because she wishes it! Well now, the truth is, Theresa—and I don't mind telling it you, but you must take care not to repeat it again to mamma—that I am *not* going to marry Mr. Pomeroy."

"Then, Miss Alice, why not tell your mamma so?"

"I shall tell mamma in good time. But I'm sure you know there'll be no living in the house with her for a week afterwards. She has set her mind upon Mr. Pomeroy; and she will be ready to box my ears when she finds I won't have him."

"But, Miss Alice—you have encouraged Mr. Pomeroy," debated Theresa, feeling less sure and less easy upon the point than she chose to say. "He comes often: he stayed with you in the drawing-room for nearly an hour to-day."

"I can't help his staying or his coming. Mamma was out, and I had to go to him. Don't you be silly, Theresa. I tell you I am not going to take the Heir of Pomeroy. And he knows that I am not."

"Trouble of this kind is more easy to get into than to get out of, Miss Alice," resumed Theresa in a low, persuasive tone. "I confess I like Mr. Rupert better than I like Mr. Pomeroy; though it's not for me



to presume to speak of my likes or dislikes. I would only just say this, my dear young lady: *do not deceive anybody*, especially your mother. If you don't like Mr. Pomeroy, and don't wish to have him, tell out the truth at once. 'Tis the safest way in the long run."

"There, you can do my hair now, Theresa. And don't worry your silly old head with what does not concern it. Things will come all right in what you call the long run, as you will find."

Leaving Alice to chatter to Theresa upon less embarrassing subjects, we will go after Rupert Pomeroy.

Passing through the convenient side gate to the shady lane on which it opened, went he, gay as a lark, humming the bars of some popular song. Rupert Pomeroy was of an essentially gay, sanguine, light temperament: he had never been grave in his life for two minutes together. The branches of the trees on either side this lane met overhead; glancing up, he saw the moonbeams flickering through them—a pleasant sight; and he broke out into his song again:

"Oh, 'tis sweet when the moon is beaming  
To rove through the shady grove:  
Oh, 'tis sweet when the world is sleeping  
To list to the nightingale's song."

"Don't think that's quite right," broke off Rupert, alluding to the words. "Think the nightingale's song goes with the moonbeams. Wish she could have stayed out longer—that 'sweet love o' mine.'"

Before quite reaching the village, he turned aside to the left. Standing at some little distance from the road was an exceedingly pretty dwelling-house, not much larger indeed than a cottage: its rough stone walls were covered with ivy; jessamine and roses en-



circled its casements. You might have been puzzled to guess to what social class its inmates belonged; in all, save its size, it might have been the abode of a gentleman. Iron railings, covered with clematis, enclosed a small garden, its grass-plat and flower-beds not less well kept than were those of Mrs. Wylde. The gate was in the middle of the rails, a path leading straight from it to the cottage porch. It was the dwelling of the gamekeeper, Gaunt, and it was called the Lodge. John Gaunt—who was not a regular gamekeeper and who will have to be spoken of later—lived in it with his only child, a daughter. Leaning over the gate in the moonlight stood the daughter now. Rupert had seen her and turned aside.

“I thought it must be you, Sybilla,” spoke he, in his ready, free way. “What in the world have you got on?”

She laughed slightly, and pushed off the shawl in which her head was enveloped. “I have a little cold,” she answered, “and my head has been aching all day.”

“By the way—yes. Joan mentioned at dinner that she had sent for you, and you were too ill to come,” observed Rupert, who remained on the outer side of the gate. “What was the matter?”

A hot flush and a slight contraction of the brow, not discernible in the moonlight, passed suddenly over her face, apparently called up by Rupert’s words. Sybilla Gaunt was a magnificent girl, tall, dignified, upright, with a no less magnificent face: her features regally beautiful, her hair of a purple black, and her large eyes of a deep, dark violet. But, with all her



natural beauty, the face looked to-night strangely wan and haggard.

"My head pained me so," she replied, slightly and evasively. "How is the lord, Mr. Rupert?"

"Oh, he is very well."

"My father thinks him much changed of late. He was at the Abbey yesterday morning—the lord had sent to him about those preserves beyond the hill. He says he never saw anyone change so rapidly for the worse as the lord is changing now."

"So Joan thinks—but she has not seen him for eight months, you know. I hope he will be all right again soon, Sybilla. Where is your father to-night?"

"He went up to Whittaker's. Do you want him?"

Without giving any direct answer, Rupert Pomeroy bent his head closer to Sybilla's over the gate, and began talking to her in a very low tone—just as if he feared some eaves-dropper might be hidden under the clematis. As we cannot hear what he said, the conversation must remain a secret. Sybilla gave an answering word, or a nod, now and again; the tears meanwhile gathering on her eyelashes, and she, half stealthily, wiping them away from time to time.

"Who's this?" suddenly cried Rupert, drawing away from the gate, his ear having caught the sound of footsteps close at hand. "Take courage, Sybilla."

They were the steps of Gaunt himself. A very tall and noble-looking man, dressed in a velveteen coat and breeches and dark leggings. His features were just as handsome as his daughter's, the two faces in fact were much alike; the same noble cast of countenance, the same fine, open, straightforward ex-



pression. As he came into view, Sybilla nodded to Rupert, and went in.

"Oh, is it you, Mr. Rupert? Did you want me?" added Gaunt.

"No; I was only saying good-evening to Sybilla, seeing her standing here as I was going by. She says you think my father much changed."

"And so he is, Mr. Rupert; there's no doubt of it. Unless he gets to look better, I—I shall hardly know what to fear. Will you walk in?"

"Not to-night. I say, Gaunt, what about dragging that fish-pond?"

"The very thing I have just been up to Whittaker's about," replied Gaunt. "We had decided to do it to-morrow, but your brother sent me word this evening that it must be put off until the next day."

"What for, I wonder?"

"He is going out, I believe, to-morrow."

"What of that?"

"Well, he says he wishes to be present when it's done."

"Oh, does he? It will come, next, that nobody must stir hand or foot on the property without his leave. You'll see that, Gaunt."

Gaunt slightly smiled. "He is the son-and-heir, you know, Mr. Rupert."

"We all know that: he takes care we don't forget it. So be it; I do not see that it matters much to us. It has pleased my father to exalt Guy ever since his babyhood, and of course he has grown domineering. Good-night to you, Gaunt."

John Gaunt stood a moment after Rupert left, thinking of his last words. He did not himself much



like Guy Pomeroy, and wondered how he should get on with him when he came into power, and whether he should feel inclined then to act as keeper. He and the lord had ever been on the best of terms; almost friends.

"Better not anticipate," thought Gaunt, as he turned in-doors.

Sybilla sat at the frugal supper-table, the shawl well wrapped about her shoulders. John Gaunt sat down and helped himself. Sybilla took a morsel upon her plate, and pretended to eat: but it was evident that she had little inclination for it.

"No appetite again, Sybilla?"

Her face flushed. "The heat makes me feel languid, father. And my head has ached to-day."

Nanny, the old serving woman, came in to remove the tray when they had finished. Gaunt rose and took down one of his small stock of books. It was a volume of Virgil—for the man was a man of education.

"I will say good-night, dear father," said Sybilla, advancing to him. "My head will get better in bed."

"Good-night, my dear one," he said, fondly kissing her. "May the holy saints have you in their keeping!"

The first thing Sybilla did upon entering her chamber—a small, pretty room, whose casement looked towards the White House—was to let the cumbersome shawl slip from her shoulders, to fall upon her knees before the crucifix that hung opposite her bed, and burst into tears. Tears? Nay; that is hardly the proper word. Sobs, rather. Passionate, grievous sobs; suppressed only lest they should be heard below.



"It is getting more than I can bear," she wailed in a piteous tone. "Who will break it to him—who will break it to him? My dear, loving, trusting father—who has ever deemed that I and deceit were as far divided as ——"

A very paroxysm of grief broke off the words. After a few moments' yielding to it, Sybilla grew calmer. Folding her hands together, she raised her eyes imploringly to the crucifix, as if seeking for that comfort above, which, as it seemed, she could not find here.

Meanwhile, Rupert Pomeroy, after calling in at Whittaker's—who was the keeper under Gaunt—and on sundry other people, for he made himself at home in the village with high and low, at length reached home. It was late. Jerome met him.

"All in bed?" asked Rupert.

"All but Mr. Guy, sir. He has not gone to his room yet."

"Where is he?"

"In the oak-room, walking about. I'm afraid something has vexed him."

"Why do you fear that?"

"Just hark at his steps, Mr. Rupert. To walk like that is not usual with Mr. Guy."

Rupert paused to listen. Guy's heavy tread sounded from the oak-room, unceasing and monotonous.

"He must be doing penance," remarked Rupert, with a light laugh.

"He has been pacing there these two hours, sir, ever since the lord retired. Just that same sharp, measured tread that you hear now."

"Well, good-night to you, Jerome," returned Rupert,



as he went on to his chamber. And he smiled again to himself as he entered it.

"You can't have quite everything your own way, Guy my brother, although you are the son-and-heir," spoke Rupert, mentally. "Alice Wylde is not for you—and you will do well to make the best and worst of her refusal, and think no more about it."

### CHAPTER III.

#### The Keeper's Daughter.

THE state entrance door of the abbey lies on the left as you go in under the great gateway. This admits you to a quaint but, in its way, magnificent hall, from which a fine old staircase winds upwards. A similar entrance-door lies on the right of the portecochère—if we may borrow a term from the French—leading into a similar hall and to a similar staircase; but at present this other entrance is kept locked, not being used. The Lords of Pomeroy generally use the one first mentioned; and just now there is no second household at the abbey.

Ascending this first-mentioned staircase, which is lined with pictures, you come into a wide corridor, which has a few pictures also hung in it, between the many entrance-doors of the front and back chambers. At the end of the corridor is the south tower: for these rooms are on the right of the entrance gates, looking eastward. It has been already said that the abbey faces the east. As a rule, the rooms are not large; rather, in fact, confined; but dark, ancient, and handsome. The present lord, who keeps up a vast deal



of unnecessary state, and whose retainers are numerous, occupies the whole of the front pile, together with a portion of the north wing; but the rooms on the other side the entrance gates have not been much used since the death of the Lady of Pomeroy some years ago, and especially since the lord fell into poor health.

The bed-rooms all face the quadrangle; most of the sitting-rooms face the sea and the open country: and in one of these sitting-rooms, on the morning following the day already mentioned, sits Miss Joan. It is the room next the south tower, is called the "purple room" from the colour of its furniture and hangings, and is the particular sitting-room of Joan. Joan has attended early mass in the chapel, has written some letters, has gone her usual rounds connected with the household, and is now preparing to sit down and sew. Joan Pomeroy is great at embroidery, and she is beginning to "work," as she calls it, a delicate cambric frock for one of Mrs. Capel's children: or, strictly speaking, for an expected one. She feels more easy on the score of her father's health than she felt yesterday, for the lord got up to breakfast this morning and looked better.

"Can it be twelve o'clock already!" exclaimed Joan, as the great clock of the quadrangle began to ring out midday, and various other clocks in the abbey followed suit. "How I must have wasted my time this morning! It was that batch of letters."

Bending her head as the last words left her lips, she regarded her work attentively. A very small portion of it was as yet done.

"But that I have begun it, I would choose the other pattern," she remarked. "It was much less



elaborate; it would not have taken more than half the time to work. Suppose I should not get this done in time?—and I have always given the babies their baptismal robe! Perhaps Sybilla can help me. I will send and ask her to stay the day ——”

“Mrs. and Miss Wylde,” interrupted one of the footmen, as he threw open the door.

Joan rose, full of dignity. Truth to say, she had not much liked either Mrs. or Miss Wylde when she made their acquaintance before leaving home. Joan had a prejudice in favour of high lineage—and these ladies did not possess it. It was not the lack of that, however, but something in themselves she remembered she disliked: on the other hand, and Joan was candid enough to admit this, she had seen too little of them to judge fairly. And, if the future lord was to marry the young lady, Joan knew that she ought to put prejudice behind her.

“I *will* like them: I daresay I shall if I try to,” passed through her mind as they entered.

“Will Miss Pomeroy pardon this early visit?” began Mrs. Wylde, as she held out her hand. “Between near neighbours—and in a remote country district—midday visits are, I believe, allowable. I had, moreover, a special object in coming thus early.”

“I am very glad to see you; it is not at all too early,” answered Joan, cordially, as she gave them her hand.

“What a lovely pattern!” exclaimed Mrs. Wylde, her eyes falling on the embroidery as she sat down.

“I am pleased to hear you say so. I was rather regretting that I had begun it: it is so intricate, and will take so long.”



"But it will be very beautiful when done. It is for an infant's frock?"

"For the little one that my sister, Mrs. Capel, is expecting."

"What a long while you stayed away, Miss Pomeroy!"

"My visits are generally pretty long when I go to her. The children do not like to part with me. But I should have returned before this had I thought papa was so ill."

"Is the lord ill?" cried Mrs. Wylde, quickly.

"He does not acknowledge it, but I am sure he must be. His looks betray it. And it seems to me that he has no spirits left; no energy."

"I have observed that myself," said Mrs. Wylde.

"He has not looked well since the attack of gout," put in Alice, nearly the first words she had spoken. "The Lord of Pomeroy has been very kind to me always; and I hope, I *hope* he will soon grow strong again."

She spoke with earnestness, laying a stress upon the second "hope." Joan looked at her with a smile, pleased at the expression of feeling. With her dimpled cheeks, her radiant brown eyes, her bright and pure complexion, Alice was indeed beautiful, and Joan did not wonder at Guy's infatuation.

"But I have not explained the object of my coming at this unseemly hour," resumed Mrs. Wylde. "I want to take you back with me to the White House for the day, Miss Pomeroy."

"Oh, thank you; but I—could not go," said Joan, quickly.

"But why?"



"For one thing, papa is so poorly—at least, in appearance—that I do not like to leave him."

"Oh, I hope you will not disappoint us, dear Miss Pomeroy! Look at Alice: how eagerly she is awaiting your consent!"

The pretty blushing face was indeed full of hope as it turned to Joan. It was so pretty, so loving, that Joan could hardly keep her eyes from it; and she began to think that Alice would be a very nice wife indeed for Guy, and to wish to know more of her.

"I will see what papa thinks," she said. "But I had intended to send for Sybilla Gaunt to spend the day here with me."

"Sybilla Gaunt!" Mrs. Wylde was beginning, remonstrance in her eye and on her lip—but Joan was already gone.

The lord was in his own sitting-room; the room next the gateway. His desk stood open on the table before him, and he looked up from his writing as Joan entered.

"Any message for either of the lads—George or Leolin?" asked he, before Joan could speak.

"Are you writing to them, papa?"

"To both of them: giving them a lecture a-piece," he added, with a half-smile.

"Do they need it then, papa?"

"Oh, boys out in the world always need that. It never comes amiss, Joan, be you very sure. I am to give your love, I suppose."

"My very dear love to both. Papa, Mrs. Wylde and her daughter are here. They wish me to go back with them for the day."

"Then go. Go by all means, Joan."



"But I do not like to leave you."

"Not like to leave me? What nonsense! Why, yesterday was the first day you were here for I can't tell how many months: what did I do, do you suppose, without you all that while? Of course you can go. I should wish you to go. Guy would wish it, I am sure. And you don't dine with us, you know, this evening."

Joan returned to the purple room to say she would go. The lord followed her, and stayed with the visitors while Joan made herself ready. As they were departing, Mrs. Wylde expressed a hope that the lord and Mr. Pomeroy would honour her table by joining it at dinner.

"I don't feel quite up to dining from home," replied the lord, shaking his head. "In a day or two, perhaps, I shall be better, and will dine with you then. As to Guy, he goes over to the town to-day, and must be back in time for our own table, for we are expecting a few gentlemen to join it."

The county town, Owlstone, some nine miles distant, was always referred to by Abbeyland as "the town." Mrs. Wylde was full of regret that neither the lord nor Mr. Pomeroy would honour her that evening; and took her departure.

"What a lovely day it is!" cried Joan, as they stepped out from the large gates.

They began their walk through the village. Joan wore a rich black silk, and (it must be confessed) a very ugly drab bonnet; she was addicted to a sober style of dress and to grave colours. Alice had on white, blue ribbons round her dainty straw hat.

In going along they saw in the distance Guy and



Rupert, who were talking with Gaunt. Guy, perhaps not seeing the ladies, started across the path that led round to the stables; walking quickly, as if he were in a hurry. Rupert came towards them. Gaunt came on also with a slower step.

"What a noble looking man he is!" exclaimed Mrs. Wylde involuntarily, alluding to Gaunt. "He would do honour to an earl's coronet."

Joan smiled. "It is said they trace their descent higher than that—to John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster. In those days, possibly, while a Gaunt was a knight, the Pomeroy was only his esquire. Our family fell for a time from its high estate."

"How is it that the Gaunts have so fallen?" asked Mrs. Wylde.

"We don't really know that they have so fallen; it may be they were never anything but simple gentle-people," lightly remarked Miss Pomeroy. "None can deny, though, that they ought to be something greater and grander if looks could ensure it."

It was true that Gaunt believed himself to be descended from John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, noted in the days of the second Richard: true that he certainly did trace his pedigree very far back. He was a gentleman by descent—meaning, of late, palpable descent—but was very poor, his income being little more than one hundred pounds yearly. He was called in the neighbourhood the "gentleman keeper," for although he was to all intents and purposes the head gamekeeper to the Lord of Pomeroy, and performed conscientiously its duties, he accepted no remuneration for it. Except the cottage, which he had rent free. And though not admitted to an equality with the



Pomeroy, much more than he would have been were he a regular gamekeeper, he and the lord were very friendly with one another. The Lord of Pomeroy respected Gaunt and liked him; both for himself, and also for his alleged descent: when alone, Gaunt had occasionally been bidden to lunch with him. But the sons, Guy and Rupert, while showing themselves sufficiently friendly with Gaunt, Rupert especially, were given at times to treat him a little *de haut en bas*, forgetting perhaps that he was not a common keeper.

Gaunt's wife had also been a gentlewoman, though poorer even than himself. She died early, leaving to their only child, Sybilla, the few hundred pounds that she possessed in her own right. Sybilla had been educated at the convent, was an inmate of it for nearly ten years. She shared in all its educational advantages, though of course the same high terms could not be paid with her that were paid with most of the pupils—such, for example, as with the daughters of the Lord of Pomeroy. Joan patronised Sybilla, who was now three-and-twenty, and really felt a great friendship for her.

Rupert, leaving Gaunt to follow at his leisure, came up with a quick step and glowing face, shaking hands with Mrs. and Miss Wylde in his gay way. Joan walked forward to meet Gaunt. Mrs. Wylde stayed to protect her daughter from the attractive wiles of Rupert, who was already chattering nonsense to her.

The gamekeeper took off his hat to Joan as a lord might do, not touching it as a gamekeeper. In his heart he probably considered himself pretty equal to the Pomeroy: superior in descent, inferior in position. His manners were good, by nature he was haughty,



though he rarely let that appear. Just as the Lord of Pomeroy lorded it over his servants, so did Gaunt lord it over the two keepers under him, so far as exacting strict obedience went. But he was kind and considerate to them; a good and Christian man.

"How is Sybilla?" asked Joan, when her greeting to himself was over.

"She is not well, Miss Pomeroy."

"I am sorry for that. I heard she had a bad headache—but that was yesterday."

"I cannot make her out," observed Gaunt. "She seems to have lost her health and spirits for some weeks past. Her face is quite drawn and thin."

"But what ails her?" questioned Joan.

"It is more than I can tell," replied the keeper, shaking his head. "She thinks it is the summer heat that affects her, but we have had many a summer as hot as this; and in the teeth of her saying it, she is cold, and has to wrap herself up. Her mother went off in a waste," he added, in a low despairing kind of tone, "and I remember she was always cold, after it set in. If I lose Sybilla——"

Gaunt stopped, overcome. All the sympathy in Joan's nature—and she had a large share of it—was aroused.

"What does Mr. Norris say? Of course you have had him to her."

"No, I have not, Miss Pomeroy. Not yet; Sybilla so strongly objects to it. She says she is quite sure she shall get better more quickly if let alone."

"I will call and see her," said Joan. "I may spare a few minutes now, as we go by."

"I wish you would, Miss Joan. And perhaps you



will kindly give me your opinion of her afterwards. If you think advice is necessary, I will at once call in Mr. Norris—whether Sybilla consents or not.”

“I will. By the way—talking of illness,” added Joan—“what do you think of my father? He seems to me to be so much altered. Do you judge him to be ill?”

“I am sure he is altered, Miss Pomeroy, but whether he is really ill is another question. People do alter greatly as they grow in years.”

“I know. But papa seems to have altered suddenly.”

“No; not suddenly. At least not very suddenly. The lord has never been the same since his illness in the spring. I alluded to it a week or two ago; I mean, to the change apparent in him; but he passed the subject off with a stiff remark. He never likes to be questioned, you know, Miss Joan.”

Joan nodded a dismissal, seeing that Mrs. and Miss Wylde were coming on, the former having at length succeeded in getting her daughter away from the light chatter of Rupert. Gaunt bowed, turned away, and put on his hat, which he had kept off during his conversation with Joan. He raised it again in passing the other ladies; who vouchsafed him the merest nod in answer. Mrs. Wylde had never been brought to understand why Gaunt should be regarded as above any ordinary keeper.

They went on through the village, these three ladies, Miss Pomeroy momentarily stopping now and again to greet the cottagers who ran out when they saw her. She was a great favourite with all.

At the extremity of this straggling village—whose



houses were mostly built in a straggling fashion instead of consecutively—they came in view of the game-keeper's lodge. Very picturesque it looked to-day, the sunshine flickering upon it through the waving trees, the many-coloured flowers clustering on the grass-plot.

"How hot it is!" suddenly exclaimed Mrs. Wylde.

"Do you feel it so?" returned Joan. "I was going to ask you to sit down for an instant on the bench while I go in to see Sybilla Gaunt. It is beautifully shady under those trees; it will rest you."

She pointed to the bench in Gaunt's garden. It stood in the shade on the green grass, and looked inviting enough. Mrs. Wylde, however, started back as if she had been struck.

"To see Sybilla Gaunt! My dear Miss Pomeroy!"

"I will not keep you two minutes," said Joan. "I am anxious about her. Her father says she is ill."

"Miss Pomeroy," repeated Mrs. Wylde, in a tone of strong remonstrance, "you must not go in *there*; to see *her*. You have no mother, my dear, therefore you must excuse my interposing, so far, in the light of one."

Joan Pomeroy, haughty and self-opinionated by nature and by training, just as all the Pomeroyes were, drew herself up. She had taken Mrs. Wylde's objection in a wrong light. "You do not yet know Sybilla Gaunt, I see, or you would scarcely speak of her disparagingly. She has been exceedingly well brought up; her education has been entirely that of a gentlewoman."

"So I have heard. But no good ever comes of educating girls in her sphere of life; and thus it has proved here. My dear Miss Pomeroy, since you left,



the girl has turned out to be—to be—in short, not respectable.”

The two ladies stood looking at one another, Joan asking the explanation with her eyes that her lips disdained to utter. Alice traced characters on the dusty road with the end of her parasol and listened, rather amused at the dispute.

“What did you say?” demanded Joan, whose fiery Pomeroy blood was rising.

“My dear, there’s no cause for you to put yourself out,” said Mrs. Wylde. “It is an every-day affair with village beauties; always has been, and always will be. Sybilla Gaunt is beautiful; but she is no longer respectable, and you must drop all communication with her.”

Joan Pomeroy’s eyes flashed: she could be nearly as passionate as her eldest brother, when greatly provoked. “It is false, whoever says it,” she declared. “How dare my father and my brothers suffer tales to go about to the prejudice of Sybilla Gaunt? They are the lords of the soil, and they ought to have put a stop to them.”

Mrs. Wylde gave vent to a short, friendly laugh. “My dear, you will have to abandon your favourable prejudices,” she quietly said. “Sybilla Gaunt is not respectable.”

“Am I respectable?” returned the angry Joan. “You may as well say that I am not. Sybilla is my friend; she is as much a gentlewoman by descent as I am. I pray you wait for me: I shall go in to see her.”

Allowing no further opposition, Miss Pomeroy walked to the lodge door, and entered without knocking. She was in no frame of mind to heed the polite



decorums of life: indeed, they obtained short favour from her at the best of times. The small, but pretty, sitting-room seemed in a litter, and Sybilla sat in it, her head bent on the table. A shawl lay on the ground: it appeared to have slipped from her shoulders.

How like she was to her father this day! Tall and stately; with the same noble features, the same unconscious, lofty air and manner. Certainly she looked a fit descendant for the proud Duke of Lancaster.

With a faint exclamation of dismay, Sybilla sprang up when she saw an intruder, and that it was Miss Pomeroy. Her pale features—not naturally so, but pale, as it appeared, from illness—grew flushed, and she picked up the shawl to throw it on again. In her haste and confusion, she defeated her own object, and the shawl somehow alighted on her head. In stretching up her arms to right it, Joan Pomeroy gazed at her with a keen gaze; and Joan Pomeroy fell back against the inner door, and her spirit turned faint within her.

Joan did not speak; she only looked at her. Sybilla's trembling hands busied themselves in adjusting the shawl, and the transient crimson of her face faded to a death-like whiteness.

"What is this?" asked Joan, at length.

"What is—what?" returned Sybilla, a terrible trouble shining in the depths of her dark violet eyes.

"I met your father, and he told me you were ill," harshly repeated Joan. "*What* is this illness, I ask?"

"Don't frighten me, Miss Pomeroy," gasped Sybilla, who looked ready to faint.

"Answer me, I say," repeated Joan, her face as stern, at that moment, as her brother Guy's.



Sybilla choked down a gasping breath before she could answer: when she did speak, it was in a faint, nervous tone, and in short, broken sentences. "The heat this summer—has been great—it has made me ill—it has overpowered me."

Joan Pomeroy heard her to an end, bending her stern, searching eyes upon her. "It is the heat that overpowers you? The heat, you say? Then why do you wear a shawl to increase it?" And Sybilla Gaunt only laid her hand upon her heart, as if to still its beating, and made no reply, for she had none to make. Miss Pomeroy stepped close up to her.

"Do you think you can deceive me? No: though you have succeeded, it would appear, in deceiving your father. You have been mad, Sybilla Gaunt; mad. You have degraded yourself——"

"Do not say too much, Miss Pomeroy," interrupted Sybilla, in a low tone. "You don't know all."

"I know and see sufficient. I know that the truth is whispered outside, and that I was warned not to subject myself to contact with you. Shame upon you! You who were the stay of your father! you who have boasted of a descent from the Plantagenets! you who were reared to be a gentlewoman! Sybilla Gaunt, I would as soon have believed ill of myself as of you."

Miss Pomeroy gathered up her petticoats, as if to guard them against contamination with the door-sill, and swept out. It was her one great failing—hot, hasty passion: in that she and Guy were alike: but she had rarely been so excited as now.

Mrs. Wylde was resting on the bench, and Alice stood outside in the road. Mrs. Wylde rose when she saw Miss Pomeroy, and hastened to get into the road



also, as if the very grass-plat at Gaunt's burnt her feet.

"Come, Alice, what are you looking at? Oh, I see; Mr. Guy Pomeroy is there."

Joan turned her head. Guy was on horseback, branching off towards Owlstone. Gaunt was now coming in the direction of his cottage.

"Let us get on," muttered Joan. "I do not want to see him."

"Well, my dear Miss Pomeroy, are you satisfied?" asked Mrs. Wylde.

"Quite," returned Joan, her voice taking a harsh tone in her bitter distress.

"Of course; there is no possibility of mistaking it. And her father is a—in fact, an idiot."

"Who is it that has—has brought the trouble to the house?" interrupted Joan, in the same abrupt tone, telling so surely of affliction.

"There I cannot enlighten you," replied Mrs. Wylde. "She has always, I hear, held herself aloof from the village rustics."

"*Held herself aloof from the village rustics!*" echoed Joan Pomeroy, with angry emphasis—angry, even then, that Sybilla's position could be so mistaken. "I tell you, Sybilla is a gentlewoman, with—hitherto—all a gentlewoman's instincts."

Mrs. Wylde coughed. Alice broke into a sudden exclamation, perhaps to drown its mocking sound.

"How very beautiful she is!"

"Who, child?"

"Sybilla Gaunt, mamma."

"Oh," said Mrs. Wylde, scornfully. "A homely saying my old mother sometimes used is a very true



one. 'Handsome is as handsome does.' Sybilla Gaunt had better have been born ugly enough to frighten the crows."

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### The Death Flag.

DARKER and darker grew the twilight of the summer night. The glow of the sunset had faded in the northwest, giving place to the colour that has been likened to opal, but still no summons arrived for Miss Pomeroy; either in the shape of carriage or servants.

At the open window of the large drawing-room of the White House, Joan sat, wondering much that no one came for her, and anxious to be gone. She had come forth to the day's visit as a matter of duty, rather than pleasure, and it had not proved agreeable to her: the instinctive dislike to Mrs. Wylde and her daughter had made itself rather obtrusively felt; for, shocked and angry though Joan herself was at the matter connected with the keeper's daughter, she did not like or approve of the contemptuous tone assumed by Mrs. Wylde. Condemnation may be given without scorn. Altogether her day's pleasure had been utterly spoiled, though Joan suffered not that fact to appear. Silent and pre-occupied, her entertainers had thought her, and extremely absurd in regard to that Sybilla Gaunt.

"Ten o'clock!" exclaimed Joan, starting up as the hour struck out from the gilt clock on the mantelpiece. "*Indeed* I must go. You will allow one of your servants to see me home, Mrs. Wylde."

"Only ten, my dear; *only* ten o'clock. It is very early yet."



"I cannot *imagine* why I have not been sent for."

"But I can, my dear Miss Pomeroy. The lord has a gentleman's dinner-party this evening, as you know: rely upon it, your brother Guy intends to come for you himself: he only waits to get rid of his guests, and be at liberty."

So spoke, so thought Mrs. Wylde. She knew nothing of the dismissal given to Guy Pomeroy by her daughter the day before. Alice sat silent and spiritless: she could not this evening steal out to meet Rupert.

So Joan, at the entreaty of Mrs. Wylde, consented to stay yet a little longer. In truth, she thought the reason assigned by that lady was probably the correct one, and that Guy would arrive shortly.

Not a breath of air could be felt, though the windows were flung up to their utmost height; not as much as a flutter disturbed the wax lights. It was a very handsome drawing-room, all gilding and mirrors, and beautiful modern objects; quite a contrast to the staid, sombre rooms at Pomeroy.

"All nouveaux riches, like themselves," thought Joan, with scant flattery.

A loud peal was heard at the hall door. It proved to be old Jerome. He brought bad news. The ladies, in their anxiety, had him into the drawing-room to listen to it.

The Lord of Pomeroy had been taken ill at the dinner-table. But he had sat out the repast bravely; allowing nothing of his indisposition to be seen. At nine o'clock he made an apology for retiring, putting it upon the score of fatigue, leaving his eldest son to supply his place. Since then he had become rapidly worse.



"Why did not Mr. Rupert come for me?" demanded Miss Pomeroy of old Jerome. "He might know that I should naturally wish to be with papa."

"Mr. Rupert does not yet know the lord is ill, Miss Joan," was the man's answer. "He went out with the gentlemen when they left. Mr. Pomeroy was going out also, but I whispered him to stay behind—and then I told him. He is with the lord now."

"Anyway, Jerome, I ought to have been sent for at once."

"Miss Joan, I believe you were forgotten; it's as true as that I am here," added Jerome in his earnestness. "One was running for Mr. Norris, one for Father Andrew, and the house was all in confusion. Mrs. Rex suddenly thought of you, and asked if anyone had been sent to attend Miss Pomeroy home. So I came myself."

"Yes, yes, quite right," murmured Joan. And she departed with Jerome.

In passing the short and shady turning that led to the gamekeeper's lodge, Miss Pomeroy's eyes naturally turned in that direction. Just at the same moment some one came up this same turning with a fleet step: from the height and figure Joan knew it to be one of her brothers, either Guy or Rupert. It proved to be the latter.

"Why, Joan!—out on foot with the night-birds!" cried he, in his ever-gay tones.

"Yes, out with the owls and the bats," she answered. "Very polite of you, I must say, to leave me at the White House until now! You might have come for me, Rupert."



"So I might. So I would, had I known. I should have thought you were at home ages ago."

"Were you coming from Gaunt's, Rupert?"

"Not I. I had been round to Bardel's."

Bardel was the junior keeper under Whittaker. Joan, who had taken her brother's offered arm, paused in reflection. She much wanted to speak to Rupert of what was troubling her; yet hardly liked to. But Joan Pomeroy, straightforward to the last degree, never beat long about the bush; if she wished to say a thing, she generally said it.

"Rupert," she began, choosing her words rather lamely, "have you heard of—of—do you know of this dreadful—dreadful misfortune, which has overtaken Sybilla Gaunt?"

"Dreadful misfortune?" repeated Rupert.

"Or—perhaps I should rather say—that she has brought upon herself?"

"Why, what has she gone and done?" cried Rupert, lightly. "Eaten chicken on fast day?"

"Rupert! Do you often see Sybilla?" continued Joan. "Have you seen her lately?"

"I saw her to-day."

"Well, then, does—does anything—*peculiar*—strike you in her appearance?"

"Not that I remember."

"Then, Rupert, you must be very unobservant—and—and I think you are only laughing at me."

"I'm sure I don't know what you are driving at, Joan. What is there in Sybilla's appearance to strike me? She talks of the heat."

Joan considered. Young men were naturally unobservant: perhaps Rupert was so.



"I—I am afraid Sybilla has—forgotten herself, Rupert," she resumed in a low, sad tone. "It will kill her father—and I should think herself too."

"Forgotten herself!—What on earth do you mean?"

"Well—she—she looks very sickly, and there must be a cause for it."

"Poor girl, perhaps there is! She may have gone and swallowed the copper tea-kettle."

"I knew you would only turn what I said into ridicule; you always do," cried Joan, vexed and humbled. "All I wished to ask you, Rupert, was, if you know whether any stranger has been intimate at Gaunt's of late."

"Let's see," said Rupert, making a show of putting on his considering cap. "I run in at will; the son-and-heir more charily. Father Andrew goes in; and I am not sure but that the lord goes."

"I said any *stranger*," repeated Joan emphatically.

"I have not seen one. Joan, my dear, let me give you a piece of advice—don't rub your head against a stone wall. As to Sybilla, I do not consider that it is any business of yours or mine to pry and peer into her affairs. Gaunt is quite capable of seeing to his own daughter."

Joan, feeling very much dissatisfied with Rupert's manner, she hardly knew why, dropped the subject, and told him of their father's illness. Not that Joan felt particularly anxious herself; for the lord was subject to these sudden attacks of sickness.

"I thought he was uneasy at the dinner-table," remarked Rupert. "Jerome," he called out, turning to wait for the laggard steps of the old servant, "is it the gout again?"



"Yes, Mr. Rupert. And a bad attack I know it will be."

"So you always say, Jerome."

"Well, sir, we shall see. I fear it will."

"It may do good instead of harm," observed Rupert to his sister, while Jerome fell behind again. "I sincerely hope it will. The gout has been hanging about him ever since the spring. A good sharp bout now may carry it away."

"Alice Wylde will marry Guy," whispered Joan to her brother, as they were approaching the abbey gates.

Rupert whistled to a little dog that ran out of the quadrangle, not replying immediately. "You think so, do you Joan?"

"And you evidently do not, by your tone," she rejoined.

"Nay, I don't pretend to understand the business of all the world, as you do. Am not clever enough for it."

"Don't be silly, Rupert. I judge only by probabilities; what I see and hear. Mrs. Wylde was hinting at different items in her own affairs to-day; though why she should have done so before me, I cannot tell, and it rather struck me she was *talking at* Alice. Did you know that if Alice marries without her mother's consent, she forfeits her twenty-five thousand pounds?"

"Yes, if she marries before she is four-and-twenty years of age. After that, there's no restriction upon her."

"Well, I did not know it till to-day. She does forfeit it however, and Mrs. Wylde, should Alice be disobedient, can will the money away to whom she



pleases. Mrs. Wylde is bent upon her marrying Guy: you can't mistake that: and no girl in her senses would forfeit so large a fortune. Therefore I judge that Alice will take Guy."

"She may not like Guy. She may prefer to wait."

"I think not. And why should she not marry Guy? What an exalted position it would be for her!"

"Next door to being up in the moon."

"Joke as you may, Rupert, I believe you will find I am right. That Alice is looking forward to it she let slip to-day. We had been talking about the abbey—it seems to be Mrs. Wylde's favourite theme—of its vastness, its gloom, and its need of restoration. 'I shall have it so renovated that you'll not know it for the same place,' Alice suddenly cried, waking up out of a reverie, 'I shall make it the admiration of the whole county.' And when she saw us look at her, she recollected herself, blushed, and laughed. 'I mean,' she said, by way of correction or excuse, 'that I should do it were I the Lord of Pomeroy.' Rely upon it, Rupert, she means to be Lady of Pomeroy."

Rupert had resumed his whistling—to himself this time and very softly, smiling much. Joan inquired why he laughed.

"To think of the changes that must take place ere she could be Lady of Pomeroy. The deaths, for instance."

"Only papa's, Rupert. Guy will be the lord then."

"True. Yes."

Lights gleamed from several of the front casements; people seemed to be passing from room to room. Jerome, full of apprehension, felt sure the lord was worse—and said so. Rupert rebuked him.



"You are ever ready to anticipate evil, Jerome."

"Well, sir, I *fear* this illness; and that's the truth. And," he added to Rupert in his agitation, "if ever I saw coming death upon a face, I saw it this night upon my poor master's."

A few days went on, full of grief and uncertainty, as to the Lord of Pomeroy. It was feared that the gout would attack a vital part; Mr. Norris, the local surgeon, was frequently at the abbey, Dr. Rayner and Dr. Bill came once a day from Owlstone.

One morning, Joan, about to pass out of the purple room, encountered Father Andrew, who had just then quitted the sick-chamber. The lord was better, and the improvement had put everyone in spirits. Joan asked him to enter, and they sat down. The renewed hope gave her leisure to revert to other troubles: these few past days the lord's state had absorbed all anxieties.

"Father," she said, in a low tone, "do you—do you know that—that anything is amiss with Sybilla Gaunt?"

The priest rose. A wasp had made its way in at the open casement, and he took out his red silk handkerchief to whisk it out.

"Nasty things, those wasps," he cried. "One of them gave me a rare sting in the neck last year. I had to sit for half a day with a wet blue-bag stuck upon the place."

"But—did you hear what I asked you, father? About Sybilla?"

"Eh, child? What about her?"

Joan repeated the words, putting them somewhat



differently. The wasp had been driven out, but Father Andrew remained at the casement, as if to guard it.

"She seems rather poorly," he remarked, speaking with his back to Joan. "Should she not get better shortly, I should recommend her to try change of air."

Joan paused. "But surely, father, you—you know what is the matter with her?"

The priest began shaking his handkerchief out at the casement. "Don't like wasps," he repeated. And Miss Pomeroy found a sudden question creeping up in her mind: was he purposely avoiding the subject?

"We have been almost as sisters, father; I and Sybilla; and, night after night, as I lie down on my pillow, I think of her as she was in the old days, and am ready to weep for sorrow. If I could aid her in her trouble," added Joan, dropping her voice to a whisper, "I should like to do it. It would not be wrong, would it?"

"Certainly not: to aid the sick or afflicted is never wrong. But," he added, turning from the casement to face Joan, "I would advise you, my daughter, not to attempt it in this case. *You could not do any good.* Sybilla has entered upon a new course; and, it seems to me, that she should be left to follow it."

He said good day, and passed from the room. Just as though it were the easiest way of ending the topic, thought Joan in her surprise. But—though strictly obedient to her spiritual adviser in every essential matter, both by training and by inclination—Joan possessed her own share of the Pomeroy will; and she did not see the necessity of obedience in this. The good father no doubt wished to spare her pain—perhaps to spare her from contact with an erring woman.



And Miss Pomeroy, following out her opinion, put on her bonnet there and then, and walked down to the gamekeeper's lodge.

Sybilla, looking more sickly than she had looked before, received Miss Pomeroy with less of emotion than then, and soon recovered her equanimity. Joan spoke plainly, but Sybilla would admit nothing. They sat together on the little sofa: the sweet red roses, trailing over the open casement, looking in upon them; the serene blue sky above seeming as a very type of heaven.

"We were girls together, Sybilla, though I was some years the elder; we were firm friends at the convent school," pleaded Joan. "If you, as seems to be only too apparent, have fallen into trouble, let me help you. You have neither mother nor sister; no one, as it were, to protect you; you were confiding, unsuspecting; but the world is an evil one, and carries its evil ways into many an innocent retreat. Oh, Sybilla, tell me all the truth, and let me help you!"

The scalding tears rolled slowly down Sybilla's cheeks; her beautiful, deep-blue eyes were averted: but if ever a clasp of the hand expressed intense gratitude, hers did as it lay in Joan's.

"There is nothing that I can tell; nothing," she faintly said. "But I thank you for your goodness, your condescension, dear Miss Pomeroy; I thank you from my very heart. I shall ever remember it."

Joan's benevolence froze a little. The tone of Sybilla's denial was unmistakably firm.

"I have come to you out of compassion, Sybilla, and against advice. No one, as you know, would be



less likely to countenance wrongdoing than I; it has cost me something to offer to condone it now."

"But you are mistaken," returned Sybilla, speaking faintly again. "I have nothing to acknowledge, nothing to confess. Indeed, Miss Pomeroy, you are mistaking me."

"Does your appearance belie you?" questioned Joan, severely. "Do you deny that you are sick?"

"I am sick; that is true. Since the excessive heat came in, I have felt languid—ill."

"Why do you muffle yourself in a shawl—why do you refuse to see Mr. Norris?" abruptly asked Joan.

"In spite of the weather, I feel cold, am often shivering inwardly," replied Sybilla, shivering now as she spoke. "As to Mr. Norris, he could do me no good."

"What would our good Lady Abbess say to this? What would Sister Mildred say?"

Sybilla was silent.

"Some days ago, when your father spoke to me about your illness, I promised to tell him what I thought of you—and now I dread to meet him. If you refuse me your confidence now, Sybilla; refuse to allow me to be your friend; you refuse for good, understand. It is the last time I shall ever ask you."

"But, indeed, there is no confidence that I can give you," persisted Sybilla, still in the same faint tone, her tears dropping quickly. Bending her head, she suddenly kissed Joan's hand. The latter rose.

"This is all then, Sybilla, that is to come of my offer?"

"May Heaven bless you, dear Miss Pomeroy. Think of me—think of me as leniently as you can."

A burst of sobs had caused the break in the words.



Joan, annoyed and disappointed, broke out with some slighting words.

"Our intercourse ceases from this hour, Sybilla Gaunt. I wish you well through your trouble; but from henceforth we are strangers."

She swept away with all her native dignity. Sybilla closed the door, and flew up to her chamber in an agony of sobs and tears.

Better, they had deemed the lord that morning, little thinking it was the last that would ever dawn for him. In the course of the day it became known that he was dying. Towards evening, when a kind of passive stupor had replaced the commotion which the dire news had occasioned in the household, and he was alone with his two sons, Joan, and Father Andrew, he began to speak of the earthly interests he was about to leave.

"Mind, Guy," he suddenly cried, after a rather prolonged silence, "Jerome is to have the keep. He is getting in years, and may not care to remain in your service. You, also, with a young wife, may prefer a younger man as your household's head. He can go to the keep at once, if he chooses; I have told him so; or he may take service with you a little longer first, as he and you may please. He has saved sufficient wages, and I have left him something more; and it is my desire that the keep shall be his to reside in, so long as he shall live. You hear me, Guy."

"Yes, father, certainly."

"Give him the keep for his home, to have exclusive control over, just as though it were his, absolutely; at his death, of course, it will be free again, and your own. Give me your promise."



"I promise, father," said Guy, rather wondering at the lord's seeming anxiety upon a matter that had virtually been settled long ago. "I promise faithfully."

"Father, I also promise," added Rupert.

Guy looked at his brother, a stern expression curling his imperfect lip at what he deemed Rupert's superfluous interference. "Why need you promise?" he asked, in a low tone. "You will never be the abbey's lord."

"In case it should lapse to me during Jerome's lifetime: that's why I spoke," returned Rupert.

At which suggested possibility Guy's lip took a still higher curl. He was likely to live as long as Rupert: perhaps longer, for he took better care of himself.

The old man died; died before the first glimmer of dawn. And Guy was the Lord of Pomeroy.

The death of a Lord of Pomeroy involved a great deal of ceremony and state. The very first thing to be done, according to the usages of the family, was to hoist the death flag.

A large, melancholy-looking flag, with the Pomeroy escutcheon on it. It was always kept at the keep, in its appointed place. This flag, fetched at once by two of the upper servants, was hoisted half-mast high over the great entrance gates, to be left there so long as the corpse remained above ground. The flag was white and the escutcheon black; and, altogether, as it waved about in the wind, it put spectators in mind of a skull and crossbones.

The dead Lord of Pomeroy was conveyed to the chapel, there to lie in state until the day of interment



—another of the Pomeroy customs—and to be visited by as many visitors as chose to attire themselves in decorous mourning. The younger sons, George and Leolin, were written to; only one of them, George, was able to respond to the call; and he but briefly. Captain George Pomeroy had obtained a great deal of absence lately for his own pleasure: now that he required it as a duty, it was but charily accorded him.

Captain Pomeroy arrived in the afternoon of the day previous to the funeral, considerably put out by the length of the passage from Ireland. Had that not been contrary, he might have stayed at home somewhat longer: as it was, his stay must be confined to less than thirty hours. He was a light-hearted, good-natured young man, his face pleasant and fresh-coloured, with the fine Pomeroy features, but, in other respects, bearing little resemblance to his elder brothers, and he was much shorter and slighter than they were. George Pomeroy was liked by all classes, high and low, and he was Joan's favourite brother. The youngest of them all, Leolin, was ill with fever and not able to come, to his own and their regret.

It was a grand show, that funeral: always made so for a Lord of Pomeroy. Priests, high in the Romish Church, came from all quarters to celebrate the mass; people of consideration flocked to it from far and near. He was buried in the family vault underneath the chapel. Guy, Lord of Pomeroy, followed first and alone as chief mourner; it was the custom of the lords to do so; Rupert and George walked after him together; and so on. Following the principal guests was John Gaunt; then came surgeons, lawyers, and others; and lastly the male servants, headed by Jerome. A-



grand funeral, a fine show; one to be talked of afterwards by the rustics of Abbeyland.

And so, Hugh, Lord of Pomeroy, was left in his resting-place; and Guy, his son, entered upon his reign.

## CHAPTER V.

### At the Stile.

"AND, now that you have made up your mind to leave me, Joan, may I ask what stay you intend to make? Not as long as the last, I hope."

The speaker was the Lord of Pomeroy. Joan looked vaguely out in the distance, at the blue sky which rose behind the far-off convent chimneys, and did not answer immediately. It was a fair day towards the end of April. The sun was warm, the sky nearly cloudless; the trees and hedgerows had put on their tender green, and the birds were singing. Joan Pomeroy had come into the garden to enjoy it; and was joined by her brother. In a few days she was to depart on a visit to her sister, Mrs. Capel.

"I hardly know," she answered presently, in reply to Guy's question. "Isabel will not part with me readily."

"It will rest with you, Joan; not with Isabel."

"True. But you know what she wanted, Guy?"

"I know that when your father died, she wrote us an absurd proposal that you should make your home with her in future."

"Why do you call it absurd?"

"It was absurd. This is your home. It is right that it should be. And I am your protector."



"You will not miss me, Guy."

"Not miss you! Merci bien, mademoiselle."

"I mean if you marry. Your wife, your children will be all in all to you, as they ought to be. You will not miss me."

"And if I do not marry?"

"In that case, I should always regard the abbey as my general home: though I should of course sometimes stay with Isabel. But you will be marrying, will you not, Guy?" she added, rather anxiously.

Guy Pomeroy, who had taken up his sister's black parasol, which she had not raised, gently flicked the bed of rhododendrons with it, in passing. His face was not less pale than of yore, but somewhat of its former sternness seemed lately to have softened down.

"It does seem rather strange to me, Guy, if I may be allowed for once to allude to the subject," she resumed, "that you do not speak to Alice. For a long, long while past I have thought you would; I thought so, even before poor papa died."

Joan Pomeroy was ignorant, you perceive, of the offer made to Alyce Wylde some months ago by the Heir of Pomeroy—and her rejection of him. Guy was not likely to disclose that. Joan believed that his whole heart lay with the girl; that his every hope was bound up in her.

"You will marry her, will you not, Guy?"

"Possibly."

"Well, then, don't you see, Guy, that you won't want me? No, nor miss me—with Alice installed here as your wife."



Miss you I always shall, Joan. And I desire—mark me—I desire and exact that this shall ever be regarded as your true home. Unless you marry.”

“I shall not marry, Guy. Yes, I know what you would say—that I am still somewhat young to say that at thirty; but a conviction, that I shall not, lies within me. I do assure you that I have no wish to marry, I never have had any, and I believe my best happiness will lie in a single life. Perhaps,” she added, half laughing, “you and Isabel may come to some compromise—eight months in the year with her, four with you. Of course, the abbey does seem like my real home; I may say it always will in my own mind.”

“Why eight months with her and four with me?” demanded Guy. “Do you call that an equable compromise?”

“Isabel is my own sister, Guy. Alice will be but my half one. Though I daresay we shall be the best of friends. Besides——”

“Besides what!” he questioned, for poor Joan had stopped.

“Do you know, Guy, I shall be *glad* to get away from here,” she added, in a low and unwilling tone. “For a time, at least. The place is not the same to me since the—the disappearance of Sybilla.”

“What nonsense!” exclaimed Guy, sharply.

“Ah, but I was very fond of her; I was indeed, Guy. She was a grand, noble girl, one that I surely thought was in fair training for heaven. And when—when she fell from all that was good, it had more effect upon me than the world saw.”

The Lord of Pomeroy’s brows had gathered into a dark frown. It was evident that condemnation of some-



body or something, probably of Sybilla herself, was just then making itself heard strongly within him; that the subject was altogether distasteful. He vouchsafed no remark.

"Have you any idea where she is, Guy? Do you think her father knows?"

"The less *you* think about it the better," retorted Guy, severely. "What have we to do with the miserable business?"

"Guy,"—in the softest whisper—"do you think she is with Rupert?"

Guy Pomeroy turned his dark face upon his sister, surprise in the sharp movement. Hers was bent on the tulip-bed.

"What can possibly induce you to ask that?"

"I—gathered the notion that it might be so, Guy—though I hardly know how," she faltered. "Rupert went away about the same time that she did——"

"Rupert came back," was the sharp interruption.

"I know he did, for a time. One day Bridget said something in a laughing way, coupling their names together. I checked her at once."

"As I must check you," retorted Guy, in his haughtiest tone. "Put these fancies altogether from your mind, Joan; I command it. Forget Sybilla Gaunt: never allow the subject to recur to you again."

He strode off towards the gardeners, working at a distance, his tall, fine form raised to its utmost height—and there never existed a finer form than that of Guy Pomeroy. Joan left the garden, her head raised as proudly as his own. Miss Pomeroy very much disliked being put down: no one but Guy ever attempted



to do it: and she was just a wee bit vexed with herself for having spoken at all.

But few changes had taken place since the death of the old Lord of Pomeroy. Guy reigned in his stead, and that was about the chief difference. All the retainers, numerous though they were, had been kept on by Guy; even old Jerome preferred active service to rest, and the keep for the present remained untenanted.

Some six weeks after the death of the late lord, Sybilla Gaunt was missing. She had disappeared. It was said that Gaunt himself had driven her in a gig to the county town, whence she took the train, and went out into the wide world. But, whether there was any truth at all, in this, could not be ascertained. According to another report, Sybilla had run away, abandoning her home and her father, to his terrible consternation, and left not a word behind to say whither she had gone. She did not come back; no news was heard of her; it was believed that the gamekeeper received letters from her occasionally, but they were not sent to his house. He performed his duties as usual, just as if no trouble had fallen upon him. No one dared to speak to him of his loss. Gaunt was not a man to be questioned: he could put down impertinence, whether from rich or poor, with as high a hand as the old lord had done in his haughtiest days. How it was, or where Sybilla was, nobody knew.

Once only Joan had spoken to Gaunt of Sybilla. It was about a month back. In passing his lodge she had halted to admire the spring flowers, so abundant, and kept in such nice order; not perceiving that Gaunt himself was stooping down near the gate. He rose up



and they stood face to face, Joan beginning to speak lightly of the blossoming beds, just as though nothing else could be in either of their thoughts. But there was a sadness in the man's beautiful features, in his fine deep violet eyes, that aroused all Joan's sympathy, and involuntarily she put a question to him, lowering her voice.

"Have you heard of Sybilla? Is she well?"

"She is quite well. Thank you truly, Miss Pomeroy, for inquiring."

There was a strange earnestness in the man's manner as he spoke his thanks; there was not a look or tone that could be construed into the smallest iota of shame or confusion; never had he given a more self-possessed, fearless answer than that. Joan said good morning. She admired the man's Spartan courage—that would not let it be seen he felt the disgrace which had come home to him. And literally and truly, that was all that had been heard of Sybilla.

Miss Pomeroy had her fortune, and could live where she liked. Not a large fortune, it is true, but considerably more than fell to the share of the three younger brothers, for the old lord had chosen to leave it so. If she made her residence at the abbey, this fortune need not be touched, except for her dress and such like personal expenses: Guy would have scorned to take money from his sister. If she remained with Mrs. Capel, Joan would undoubtedly contribute her share of the house-keeping, for the Capels were poor.

The small fortune inherited by the younger sons was paid over to them a very few weeks after their father's death. Rupert, who had only waited for it, being short of funds, betook himself at once to Lon-



don, ostensibly to look after a government appointment that he had received the promise of. Guy graciously intimated to his brother that he was welcome to make the abbey his home until the appointment should be given; but Rupert thought he had better be on the spot "to look the people up:" at least, that was the idea given in his answer. Guy suspected—nay, he knew—that Rupert might have confessed to a more weighty motive than that of "looking up" the government. He had debts, poor fellow: the few thousands inherited from his father would be nothing like enough to settle them, and it might be just as convenient that his place of residence should be a less conspicuous one than Pomeroy Abbey. That was some months ago. Rupert had not got the appointment yet; but Guy had reason to know he was adding to his debts, instead of paying them. Ready money, and the temptations of London! an irresistible position for Rupert the thriftless. George Pomeroy was in India, his regiment having been ordered there the previous autumn.

Another lovely spring day, still warmer than yesterday. The hedges seemed to be clothed in a more luxuriant green, the sky to be darkly blue with an earnest of coming summer; the grass, growing long, was intermixed with oxlips, cowslips, and bluebells, and the long deep-pink flowers that children call coo-koos. Alice Wylde, rambling in the fields near her house, had sat down upon a low stile amidst these homely flowers, and thought pensively of the happy years of her childhood, when the greatest of her simple delights had been to go into the meadows and gather such—delights that would never return. Her straw



hat shaded her face; her coloured muslin robe was pure and fresh.

She was deeply unhappy. Loving Rupert Pomeroy with all the intensity of an impassioned and not well-disciplined heart, this long absence from him had seemed like a separation of years. It was September when he went away; it was April now—nearly May. All those months, and never to see him, never to hear of him—save for a word or so dropped now and again by Miss Pomeroy or Guy. He had not written to her: there might be danger in that: neither did she know his address in London. In point of fact, there was no engagement between them—never had been; only love.

And Guy, the lord, was wooing her still; wooing her silently. She gave him no encouragement whatever; rather repelled him, tacitly. She did not do it openly, not caring to invoke the displeasure of her mother. Joan had wondered why her brother was so dilatory in asking the young lady to be his wife, but Guy was only “biding his time.” Discouraged by her manner, he preferred to work his way with her, rather than speak again too soon and provoke a second refusal. But Guy was getting impatient, tired of the delay; and—Alice Wylde is sitting on the low field stile there, looking at the flowers with eyes that see them not.

She steps off the stile and leans against it, for she hears footsteps approaching; and, though the hedge hides the intruder, she knows them to be the Lord of Pomeroy's.

“Good morning, Alice.”



"Good morning," she returned, preparing to move away.

"Stay," said Guy, putting his arm before her; "I cannot go on like this; I cannot be shunned for ever, as you are shunning me. If I come up with you out of doors, you walk away; if I call at the White House, you will not remain in the room. I have been there now, talking to your mother; and she says, and I say, that matters should be brought to an issue."

"They were so brought long ago," replied Alice. "Only you will not take my answer."

"No, I will never take that answer," returned Guy. "Oh, Alice!" he added, changing his tone to one of deep tenderness, "have compassion upon me! my love for you is eating away my heartstrings."

"I cannot love you," she replied, in a low tone.

"So you have said. I have asked you, as I ask you now, Why?"

"Love is not a thing that can be called up at will. It cannot be bought and sold; as you would barter a jewel."

"Sufficient of it will come at will; if there be no bar. I am ready to take you, and chance it. Is there a bar?" he continued, in a meaning tone. "Latterly I have grown to think it."

Alice Wylde hesitated. The persecution—for so she looked upon it in her spirit of opposition—of Guy Pomeroy had become intolerable to her: when she woke in the morning, the consciousness that she should meet him in the day, possibly be forced to listen to his love-making, to a second edition of his offer, would rush over her with a feeling of mingled doubt and despair. That this state of things could not continue, common-



sense told her. On her side she was getting angry and vexed with Rupert: but just at this moment it seemed to her that she must get rid of Guy. What if she told him there was a bar? it might put an end to his hopes and his tormentings. So she spoke out on impulse; not weighing her words.

"If I were to impart to you that there is a bar, would it convince you that your wish to address me cannot be carried out?"

"What is the bar?"

She did not answer. A wave of something that looked like terror passed over Guy's face. His voice became strangely agitated.

"Not that of love!—of love for another? Oh, Alice, do not say it!"

"I must say it, if I am to speak the truth," she whispered. "I do love another."

Guy's face took a darker expression. "Has another dared to woo you?"

"Dared?"

"Yes—dared. For it must have been done in secret—in dishonour. Your mother knows nothing of this."

"I would ask the Lord of Pomeroy to spare me—to my mother as to himself."

"Alice, this is no child's play. I have a right to inquire into this matter, to be told the whole truth. Who is it that has dared to come between us?"

In her inmost heart Alice thought that the sentence might have been changed; that the one to "come between" was Guy himself—between her and Rupert.



"If you will not accord me an explanation, Alice, I must ask it of your mother. Oh, my dear, why won't you trust me?" he continued, in a softer tone. "Confide in me as in your best friend: you have never a warmer one."

"It is your brother," she faltered, her voice falling to a whisper.

"My brother!" repeated Guy, looking at her in amazement. "Which brother?"

"Rupert."

A minute elapsed before Guy took in the sense of the words. So unconscious had he been of any such pretension on Rupert's part that he thought even now he must have misunderstood her.

"It cannot be," he said. "Rupert?"

"Alas, yes! He is my best-beloved."

Alice had heard of the passion that on occasion Guy Pomeroy could fall into. It arose now. Bewildered, confused, in his bitter disappointment, his dearest hopes struck back upon him, he hardly knew what he uttered.

"Rupert!" he foamed. "Rupert! the ill-doing spendthrift! the disgrace to the name of Pomeroy! who is now in hiding, lest his reckless debts should be visited upon him; whose light conduct here in Abbeyland would be a by-word in men's mouths, but that he is a Pomeroy! who—— But I do not believe you," suddenly broke off Guy, his passion cooling down, as he revolved the past in the light of common sense. He could not remember that Rupert and she had been sufficiently intimate for love to supervene. "It is a mistake, Alice. You never saw much of Rupert, or he of you."



Alice leaned against the top bar of the stile. She did not reply; but the rich flush of love, remembered love, mantled her cheek, and her lips parted with a half-smile. It maddened Guy.

"Do you wish to drive me wild?" he asked, scorn-  
ing concealment. "Why don't you say that you never  
met him—to love; that you are asserting what is false,  
only to deceive me?"

"I have said what is true. And, as to not meeting,  
I should be sorry to meet you in secret, as I have met  
Rupert."

"You—a gentlewoman—and my promised wife—  
can stand there and avow to me that you have met  
Rupert Pomeroy in secret?"

"I am not your promised wife," retorted Alice, bent  
on vexing the lord in her own sense of discomfort.  
"And there was no other way in which we could meet,  
for you had gained the ear of my mother. If we did  
meet in secret, where was the harm? do you think  
Rupert would let harm come near me?"

"He—he made love to you?"

"Yes; he loved me. When you were paying your  
formal visits in the day, Rupert paid his in the even-  
ing. We used to walk about in the grove yonder—and  
oh, we were so happy!"

The Lord of Pomeroy turned his face from Alice,  
bending it on the ground: it was well, perhaps, she did  
not see it then. His love for her was indeed as a  
volcano raging within him: he could not give her up;  
far rather would he have given up life and all its bene-  
fits. What could have possessed her to meet him in  
this spirit of bravado? Guy was not one to bear it  
tamely, or to be balked of his revenge. As to Alice—



she should be his, even if he died for it. And death seemed, in his present mood, to be far too good for his treacherous brother.

"Alice," he said, compelling his tone to an unnatural calmness, "your love is worse than wasted, if it be given to Rupert Pomeroy."

"Wasted?"

"Yes, he had none to waste; or to give to you."

Again the rich red flush of remembrance dyed her cheeks, and her lips were parted with the same sweet smile. Guy kept down his temper.

"I say Rupert Pomeroy had no love to give to you. He deceived you if he professed it; he was only amusing himself."

"You shall not traduce him to me," she interrupted, with spirit. "I will not listen to it. You know the motive which has obliged me to confide this to you—that you may fix your hopes elsewhere. Keep my secret, Guy, and be generous: perhaps I shall be your sister some time."

"Walk with me a little way, Alice," he suddenly exclaimed. "Not far."

Mechanically she obeyed, for his tone was imperative. Guy offered her his arm; but she bowed a refusal.

"You would take Rupert's," he said, with reproachful scorn. And then chafed in spirit for having said it.

"It is not the custom for young ladies to walk arm-in-arm in public. And I am quite alive to the exactions of custom," she added, throwing back her head.

"Custom!" retorted Guy—"between a man and woman who are to form the closest tie on earth?"

"Did you speak of yourself, or of Rupert?" she



returned, delightfully aggravating. And the Lord of Pomeroy, after a look that must have betrayed the bitterness of his heart, walked by her side in silence. But all this only tended to augment the turmoil, the resentment that was shaking his every fibre. If ever a man had been desperately ill-used on earth, he believed that it was himself.

The next field brought them within view of the gamekeeper's lodge. The back of it was towards them. The windows were closed, the house seemed deserted: it often looked so, now Sybilla was gone. Old Nanny liked to be solitary. Guy stopped, laid his forefinger on Alice's arm, and caused her to turn towards it.

"You see that place, Alice?"

"Yes, what of it?"

"Look at it, my dear. Study it well."

"It is Gaunt's cottage," she exclaimed wonderingly. "Why am I to look at it?"

"It might be well that you should see it. Because *there* was where Rupert's love was given."

She was slow in comprehending. No suspicion of the sort had ever dawned upon her. Guy's words only called up thoughts of the gamekeeper and the cottage: not of Sybilla. Guy, saying no more for the moment, turned back with her home. Presently he spoke.

"There are certain topics, Alice, that we may not discuss openly; custom, which you avow yourself a disciple of, does not sanction it; the proprieties of life would not sanction it; nevertheless, some of this reserve must be forgotten, even to a young lady, when circumstances imperatively compel it."

Alice Wylde turned her wondering eyes upon him.



"You know that Sybilla Gaunt has left the place," he resumed, in a low, deep tone: "you know, at least it is probable you do, why she was obliged to leave it."

"Well?"

"She is with Rupert."

Silence ensued. Guy glanced round. Alice was walking on, but he could not see her face, her hat shaded it from him.

"The author of the disrepute that fell upon Sybilla Gaunt was Rupert Pomeroy," continued Guy: "he who ought to have guarded her from it. Rupert—I tell it you fearlessly, Alice, for it is the truth—is heartless as he is high. And so—he pretended that his whole love was yours!"

"It was—*hers*?"

"Yes; he is both base and false."

As a blast of lightning falls upon a tree, and shatters it, so were these words falling upon Alice Wylde's brain. At the end of the last field, which skirted Mrs. Wylde's garden, Guy walked forward and held the gate open for her to pass through. He could have broken again into passion, had he been sure that her emotion arose from love of Rupert: her countenance was white with agony.

"Is it true?" she gasped.

"It is true as that you and I are here, living."

---



## CHAPTER VI.

## The Lord's Triumph.

WALKING slowly towards the open window of the dining-room, the footsteps of the Lord of Pomeroy echoing in her ears as he strode away from the garden gate, went Alice Wylde, feeling as if the best part of her life had been crushed out of her.

Remembrance was busy within her; events of the past were rising up, trifles which had caused no reflection at the time. She remembered once to have made a slighting remark to Rupert of Sybilla Gaunt, and Rupert had abruptly changed the theme. Again, she remembered, in driving home with her mother from a dinner-party, one moonlight night, at which they had met the lord and Guy, but not Rupert, who had sent an excuse, she saw Rupert standing by the trees at Gaunt's cottage; and there was another shadow near his, an undefined one: the gamekeeper's she had concluded, and she had wondered why Rupert had gone down there so late. Of course that shadow must have been Sybilla's.

How was it that she had been so blind? Who but Rupert, with his fascinating manners and his handsome form, with his careless principles and indifference to consequences, was likely to have turned the head of Sybilla? The inferior people about her?—Sybilla would have spurned them under foot. Times and again she had wondered to herself with a hazy sort of indifference whom the recreant truant could be. How could she have been so innocently unsuspecting? The very fact of Sybilla's quitting the place with Rupert—



or nearly at the same period—might have served to open her eyes.

The revulsion of feeling was to Alice terrible: all her love seemed to be thrown back upon herself, just as she in her turn had been flinging back Guy's: she could have wept tears of agony at the thought of how Rupert the false must have laughed at her credulity. At her, who had told him of her rejection of Guy, of her refusal to become the Lady of Pomeroy for his sake: they had made fun of the lord together, of him and his hopes. Oh, blind, blind, blind!

In her way, Alice Wylde was no less vindictive than Guy. Already she began to wonder how she could be avenged on Rupert. There was one way, if she could bring herself to take it, that would at least show Rupert she did not care for him: accept Guy.

The opening of the gate, as she stood still thinking these thoughts, caused her to turn. Guy had come back again.

"Alice," he began, "when——"

"Say nothing to me now," she interrupted, her tone a mixture of fierceness and despair, "or I shall be visiting the hate upon you that I am beginning to feel for Rupert. If he has thus trifled with me—if he has a false heart——"

"He has a false one," said Guy. "He lives but to trifle. You are not the first he has professed to love; or was Sybilla, either. The village could tell you various tales."

The village could. Many a foolish escapade had been laid, right or wrong, at the door of the gay and attractive Rupert. But the village held its peace, for was he not a Pomeroy?—and, amongst the simple



around, it was pretty generally held that the Pomeroy, like kings, could do no wrong.

The Lord of Pomeroy spoke his farewell and departed: Alice did not answer him, but went on indoors. Not that she intended any particular discourtesy to him, but her mind was in a chaos of tumult. "To come to me with his false vows, from the company of that girl!" she muttered to herself; "to win my love; to play upon my credulity; to sport with my heart's most sacred feelings; and then return to whence he came—to her! Oh, mercy! how shall I support myself?"

A little voice came whispering to her, Is it true? or is Guy deceiving you? She thought it was true; the probabilities, looking back, seemed to say that it was. But she went to her mother, who was on her dressing-room sofa, deep in the pages of a fashionable novel, and asked out a question boldly: little cared she, in her despair, for what Guy had called the proprieties of life.

"Mother, who was it that led Sybilla Gaunt on the wrong path?"

Now it happened that Mrs. Wylde was particularly alive to the proprieties at that moment; for the book before her was of the most orthodox school: filled with holy little village children and young clergymen with long (and very unbecoming) black skirts, and who had never heard of "wrong paths," much less come in contact with them. Therefore Mrs. Wylde bent a severe brow on Alice.

"Young lady! such topics are ignored in society. What are you thinking of?"

"I want to know who it was that led Sybilla



Gaunt into sin," proceeded Alice, plunging deeper into the mire.

She stood before her mother with a pale face and eye of dark misery, and it brought down Mrs. Wylde from her stilts.

"Alice, what in the world is the matter? What is Sybilla Gaunt to you? It was not Guy Pomeroy; therefore——"

"Was it Rupert?"

"Child, I say, these subjects are better let alone. What has come to you? Of course it was Rupert: everybody knows that."

"Why did not the village shun him? He was popular; he was courted up to the very hour he left it."

"The village shun a Pomeroy!" derisively retorted Mrs. Wylde. "If a Pomeroy chose to tell them they must sell their souls to him, they would only kneel and do it. That is enough, Alice; the topic is not a suitable one for you."

But now, Mrs. Wylde, in her zeal, or perhaps, it may be said, in her animus against Rupert, spoke more surely than she had grounds for. In talking one day with her own maid, a flighty, gossiping damsel named Lettice, she had introduced the subject of Sybilla and her misdoings. "Who can have been her admirer?" spoke Mrs. Wylde. "Oh, ma'am, that's not known," said the girl, "but I'd lay something it's that good-looking Mr. Rupert Pomeroy." Not another hint, save this, had Mrs. Wylde heard: and yet she took upon herself to make this confident assertion to her daughter.

It chanced, this same day, that Joan Pomeroy



called at the White House, with the information that she was about to leave the abbey for a season. Left alone with Alice for a moment, the latter approached her with an eager whisper.

"Miss Pomeroy, please tell me: was it known who—who ran away with Sybilla Gaunt?"

Miss Pomeroy looked surprised. She disdained to equivocate, and therefore did not reply. "Are you ill, Alice?" she asked, noting the girl's paleness.

"I have heard that it was your brother Rupert," resumed Alice, her eyes strained on Joan with a wild expectancy that it was not pleasant to look upon.

Joan Pomeroy bowed her head. "I do not know, myself."

"But you cannot tell me it was *not*?"

"No, I cannot. I ask, Alice, if you are ill?"

"Oh, no," she answered, with a hollow laugh, "I am very well."

Meanwhile, Guy Pomeroy, smarting under the treatment accorded him by one he loved so passionately, stung to the heart at the deceit practised upon him by his brother, proceeded home with a step that had a sound of fury in it. Only that very morning application had been made to him on behalf of Rupert by Mr. Hildyard, their family solicitor in London. Rupert had been arrested upon a "judgment" that had been obtained against him, and unless the Lord of Pomeroy came forward to extricate him, he must go to the Queen's Bench prison. Guy had been wavering all the morning as to whether he should respond to this appeal or not. He had not too much cash to spare, and he quite believed that if he extricated Rupert from this mess, he would be in a



similar one to-morrow; but still, Guy was not altogether unbrotherly, and he did not care to hear of a Pomeroy being sent to prison. The matter had been filling his mind up to the hour of his visit at the White House, argument for, answering argument against: but what he had heard decided him now.

Opening his desk, he penned a sharp, brief note to the solicitor.

“DEAR MR. HILDYARD,

“The arrest of my brother Rupert is, no doubt, only the precursor of many other such arrests. In fact, how he has been allowed to go scot-free so long, surprises me. Nothing that you or he can say would induce me to interfere; and I desire that you will not appeal to me again, now or later. With regard to the Queen’s Bench, a sojourn within its walls may do him good. This decision, so far as I am concerned, is final. “POMEROY OF POMEROY.”

That was the usual signature of the Lords of Pomeroy. And thus, the appeal being unfavourable, Mr. Rupert Pomeroy was escorted to prison. So far as appearances might be trusted, his stay there would not be a short one.

In the course of the following afternoon, the Lord of Pomeroy arrived at the White House in all the state that it much pleased the Pomeroy family to observe on occasions of importance, and which was nothing uncommon then: a gilded carriage with his arms emblazoned on it (arms that were used only by the reigning lord), four prancing horses, attendant ser-



vants in their sumptuous liveries of purple velvet and silver. Tormented nearly to madness, Guy Pomeroy had conclusively determined to put his fate to the trial without further delay, and to make his proposals in due form.

"Oh, my goodness!" cried Mrs. Wylde, running to the window upon hearing the clatter below—"Alice, it is the Lord of Pomeroy! He has come in state. What can it mean?"

Alice, looking pale enough for a ghost, for she had passed just such a restless, sleepless night as Guy, pushed her pretty hair from her face in consternation. "He might have given me another day or two," she murmured.

"Another what?" cried Mrs. Wylde.

"Another day or two for thought," sighed Alice. "I suppose he has come for—for my answer."

"Has he made you an offer?"

"He has renewed it, mamma. He made it before the old lord died."

"Oh, you crafty child! Never to tell me!"

"I refused him. I told him I would never, never have him; that he was never more to speak to me upon the subject. But yesterday he spoke again."

"Well?"

A message interrupted them: the Lord of Pomeroy waited to see Mrs. Wylde.

"Now, Alice, what am I to say to the lord?" asked the mother, suppressed anger in her tone.

"I am sure I don't know what," sighed Alice, looking the very image of perplexed despair.

"What do you mean by that, you wayward girl. *Not know?* You can do but one thing—accept him."



"There's so much to be said on both sides the question," pleaded Alice. "I—do—not—like—him—you know; but——"

"*I* know!" broke in Mrs. Wylde. "Don't bring my name in, like that, Alice. If you don't like him, you ought to be ashamed of yourself; that's all I know. You have done your best to flirt with him; to draw him on."

"Ah no, not lately, mamma; not for a good many months now. I did—perhaps—flirt with him a little for fun once; but it must be as much as a year ago."

"You did more than flirt a little with him for fun; *you did all you could to lead him on to love you*," spoke the angry lady impressively. "And you succeeded. If ever man loved woman, the lord loves you—and your life with him will be as one long, happy day-dream. The Lady of Pomeroy!" continued she in an ecstasy of aspiration. "Mistress of Pomeroy Abbey! Why, for that position, Alice, half the girls in the country are fighting! And it is at *your* feet. Surely you will not be so idiotic as to play with the lord any longer?"

"Yes, I know—I admit there is a great deal to be said on both sides," assented Alice.

"Well, I must not keep him waiting. And, Alice, I shall accept him."

"No, don't do that," Alice replied, in quick fear. "If I accept him, I will do it myself. But I must speak to him in private first."

Guy had come to lay his formal proposals for her daughter's hand before Mrs. Wylde; and he did so. Flattered, delighted, the hopes and the doubts which



had tormented her laid to rest, Mrs. Wylde received them in the most gracious, not to say gushing, manner. Alice was shy, she told him, uncertain; it was in the nature of young maidens to be so; but she was sure she cared for the lord at heart, and would doubtless accept the honour done her, and listen to his suit. The lord, upon that, requested to see Alice; and the mother retired, to send her in.

"You know, Guy," Alice answered, when he held her hands, and put the question to her almost as formally as he had put it to her mother, "that I have told you I cared for Rupert——"

"Yes, yes," he frowningly interrupted.

"And therefore I do not—in that way—care for you, for we cannot care for two people at once; it is impossible. It was *true*—what you told me of him—about Sybilla Gaunt?"

"It was true."

"Then I shall never, never care for him again, and I will try never to think of him. From henceforth, my best endeavours shall be given to hate Rupert Pomeroy."

"And to love me," he softly whispered.

"That will come in time."

"My darling, that is all I ask. And you will be my dear wife?"

"I will: I promise. But you must please understand one thing, Guy—that but for Rupert's having played me false, I never could have married you. I mention it by way of excuse for what you may have deemed my ill conduct to you all this while. Rupert——"

"We may drop Rupert's name now," again inter-



rupted Guy, showing impatience at even the mention of his brother.

"Yes; and drop it for ever," acquiesced Alice. "Traitor!"

\* \* \* \* \*

The news went forth to the world—the local world. The Lord of Pomeroy—the great man amid its great men—had chosen his helpmate; he was to espouse the daughter of Mrs. Wylde, whom he, as was shrewdly suspected, had been for some time courting. The young lady was not of distinguished descent; of no descent at all, in fact; but she had both riches and beauty.

Gaily and swiftly went on the preparations for the wedding; both Mrs. Wylde and Guy urging to a speedy day; perhaps neither of them, remembering the past, felt quite sure that Alice, in her caprice, might not waver again. Joan Pomeroy put off her visit, and consented to remain at the abbey for the ceremony. Her sister, Mrs. Capel, would come for it, and they would depart together when the gaieties were over.

The village of Abbeyland lay in a hollow. On its right, as we look towards the sea, rose the very long and gentle hill, winding and turning until it reached the forest: the White House being about midway between the forest and the abbey. Sheltered within the skirts of this dark forest was an old and lonely cottage, inhabited by an old woman named Rex—Naomi Rex.

In the days gone by, there had been a rather large colony of Rexes in Abbeyland—all of them close and staunch adherents of the Lords of Pomeroy. Some of them had been in their personal service—valets or



house-stewards; and one had held the post of head game-keeper before Gaunt. An ordinary keeper was he, receiving his wages; not, as Gaunt was, a "gentleman keeper." All the male Rexes had died out; of the women there remained three: Malvina Rex, who was the housekeeper at the abbey, and was called Mrs. Rex, though she had never been married; Naomi Rex, who was the old widow of Anthony Rex, the housekeeper's brother; and Bridget Rex, who was daughter to another deceased brother, and who lived at the abbey with her aunt. Naomi Rex, the widow, lived in the cottage in the forest, upon a small, comfortable income realized by her late husband; the late Lord of Pomeroy having accorded to her the use of the cottage for life. These Rexes knew as much about the traditions of the Pomeroyes, and about themselves too, as long-retained servants in a family do get to know. The Rexes had always been respected by the villagers; treated by them with more consideration than they showed to one another, in regard to their having been confidential retainers of the lords of the soil.

It wanted about a week to the wedding, for which all kinds of great preparations were afoot, when Mrs. Wylde chanced one hot morning to pass the cottage in the forest, and saw Naomi. Naomi was popularly supposed to be falling into her dotage. Like many imaginative persons, who, when they get into years, are fonder of ruminating on the past than of talking of the present, she would sit for hours on the bench outside her door in silence, her eyes fixed on the landscape that rose before her, the most conspicuous feature of which was the abbey, and her mind lost in



the days that had been. It was thus that Mrs. Wylde found her. That lady, who had not felt well of late, and had moreover a horrible fear upon her that she was getting frightfully stout, was ordered by Mr. Norris to take as much walking exercise as she could; she often passed the cottage in her walks, and had made acquaintance with its tenant.

"Good morning, Naomi."

"Good morning to you, madam," replied Naomi, roused out of her reverie, and getting up to curtsy, with all her habitual respect, and to remain standing as long as Mrs. Wylde chose to halt at her palings. The manners then observed by the humbler classes to their betters were very different from those obtaining in these degenerate days: moreover, Naomi Rex knew that Mrs. Wylde was the mother of the future Lady of Pomeroy. It was the highest position in all the world, in poor Naomi's estimation: princes were, no doubt, great and grand; but the Pomeroyes were greater.

"Would you please to condescend to walk in and rest, ma'am," asked Naomi, observing that her visitor's comely face looked hot and tired. "It's shady in my little parlour."

"I don't mind if I do," said Mrs. Wylde. "One feels the hill in this sultry weather. Stay; no; not indoors; I will sit on this bench," she added, sitting down on the same bench from which Naomi had risen. "How pleasant it is here!"

"Ay, ma'am, that it is. Just look, please, at the sweep o' landscape. The fair plain, and the bold rocks, and the sea shining yonder; with the abbey right before one's eyes, and the blessed convent standing off in the distance, like a peaceful haven!"



"It all looks peaceful to me, after that hill. But you must sit down yourself, Mrs. Rex."

"Thank you, madam, no," curtseyed the old lady. "I'll stand."

"Now, unless you take this very place from which I disturbed you,"—putting her hand out to the space by her side—"I shall go away again," said Mrs. Wylde, firmly. And Naomi, who knew what proper manners were, sat down at once. She was a cleanly-looking old lady, with a pale, thin face, wearing a big-bordered cap with black bows; a short dark gown, and a black-and-white print 'kerchief crossed upon her shoulders, which partially hid the small, beautiful cross, gold and blue enamel, that lay on her neck.

"I hope this day next week will be as fine as this one is!" impulsively spoke Mrs. Wylde, following out her thoughts: and they were rarely absent now from the ceremony that was to be.

"The saints grant it!" acquiesced Naomi.

Mrs. Wylde, recalled to the present, laughed. "You know, then, what is to take place on that day?"

"Know!" exclaimed Naomi, in her surprise at the question. "Ma'am, could I be off knowing aught that concerns a Pomeroy?—especially so momentous an event as the marriage of the lord! I trust, to my heart, the lord is marrying for his happiness: and the sweet young lady, too. I trust that it is not in *his* day the prediction is to be fulfilled."

Now, if Mrs. Wylde had just spoken on impulse, so, most assuredly had Naomi, in saying this. All the morning long, one certain subject, *this* subject, had been haunting her mind. Aware of the slip she had



made, she was hasting to speak of something else, but Mrs. Wylde caught the word up sharply.

"Prediction! What do you mean? Prediction of what?"

"There used to be a prediction talked of in the Pomeroy family, when the late lord was young," calmly answered Naomi, silently crossing herself. "Hardly an ancient family in the land, ma'am, but has its beliefs and its forecastings."

"Doubtless," assented Mrs. Wylde, with dignity, as if to imply that she was of an ancient family herself. "What was the prediction about?"

"It was just a verse of rhyme, ma'am; four lines, maybe; though I don't call to mind, at this moment, how they run."

"And what did they predict?"

"They tell of some ill-fortune that is to fall upon the Pomeroy, after the marriage of one of the lords. But it's a marriage that must be entered into with deceit and craft—so it is not likely to fall in these days, for the Pomeroy is honourable; they disdain a lie. I remember hearing the late lord joke about it to his lady soon after their marriage, saying that it could not fall in his time, since he had not fulfilled its conditions."

"What nonsense it must be!" cried Mrs. Wylde. "Who made it up—who spoke it?"

"No one knows that, madam. It is some generations ago now."

Mrs. Wylde burst into laughter. It must be confessed that she had little reverence for such superstitions, and would as soon have believed in a ghost itself as in a "prediction."



"Then I think the present lord has no cause to fear. If generation after generation has been passed over, surely his will be. The Pomeroy's are very fanciful, are they not?" added Mrs. Wylde, consigning the subject to the oblivion it deserved.

"They have their opinions, ma'am, and their traditions. All old families have."

"You have seen a great deal of the Pomeroy's in your time?"

"Aye, ma'am, I have. I was a Rex, ma'am, you see, and cousin to my late husband; and the Rexes have always been close servants of the Pomeroy's. Old Jerome's mother, by the way, was a Rex too, but only distantly related to us. The late lady took a good deal of notice of me."

"You had no children, I think?"

"No, ma'am, never. It sometimes falls out, I've remarked, that when man and wife are cousins they don't have any."

Mrs. Wylde nodded. "I suppose you will go to see the ceremony?"

"Doubtless, ma'am. The lord himself bade my sister-in-law, the housekeeper, invite me to the abbey for the day, and they'll send for me betimes. It's but a slip of a walk round to the chapel from thence, and I can manage that. I'd not be off seeing the wedding for a good deal."

"What sort of a young man is the youngest son?" asked Mrs. Wylde, who never lost an opportunity of getting information about the family she so revered.

"Charming young men, both the younger ones," exclaimed Naomi Rex, warmly. "Not as grand in stature as the lord and Mr. Rupert, but fresh and fair-



looking as a summer's day. Mr. Leolin is a bit haughty in manner like the lord; but Mr. George—Captain Pomeroy they call him now—is just a favourite with everybody. It is he that has the good heart. He takes after his mother.”

“I have seen him: he was here when we first settled at the place,” remarked Mrs. Wylde. “But I did not see him when he came to the funeral.”

“His stay was so short, ma'am. Short as it was, though, he came up to see me between the lights—bless him! ‘Naomi,’ says he to me, in his pleasant way, ‘this is an age for scientific discoveries; but there's one discovery that they don't make, and that is to change a gale at sea into a calm.’ He was kept back two whole days by a hurricane in crossing from Ireland—as maybe you heard at the time, ma'am.”

“Oh, the sea is dreadful,” remarked Mrs. Wylde. “We had a three days' gale off the Cape when I was coming from India; the waves rising mountains high and beating us back every minute. I never was so frightened in my life. And now I must go,” she added, beginning to tie the strings of her grey chip bonnet, which she had untied for coolness; “but I must ask you to give me a glass of water first.”

Naomi called to her little maid, Ann, and the water was brought. After drinking it, Mrs. Wylde turned to pursue her way.

“What a beautiful cross that is!” she exclaimed in admiration, her eye catching sight of it as Naomi bent forward to close the gate after her.

“It never leaves my neck, ma'am, night or day, save when I want to renew the ribbon; I look upon it as a charm,” spoke the old woman.



"Some relic, I suppose!"

"A relic of the Pomeroy's, madam. My late lady gave it to me after Master Leolin was born. Her maid was ill at the time, and the nurse was taken ill; a sort of epidemic, I suppose it was, and they sent for me. My lady liked me to be about her; and though the two young women soon got well, she kept me for six weeks, and gave me this cross when I left. Oh, she was a good, considerate, sweet-tempered lady—and Master George is the very model of her. Good day, madam; my service to you."

Mrs. Wylde walked slowly home, her thoughts running in a desultory kind of way upon the interview. A lovely cross, she said to herself, quite out of place upon that old woman's wrinkled neck; it was perfectly absurd to give it to her. If captain George were as indiscriminate as his mother in such matters, she should not say much for his sense. And what autocrats the Pomeroy's seemed to have been always!—and how proud this old creature was of having served them! Thus Mrs. Wylde's reflections ran on, from one point to another—but never once did they recur to the "Prediction."

The days sped quickly onward, and the eve of the wedding arrived. Visitors, in the shape of Mr. and Mrs. Capel, came to the abbey; one or two to the White House: but the guests would chiefly assemble on the day only.

In the afternoon Alice sat in her own room, her maid Theresa busy packing. Just a small trunk of clothes would be conveyed to the abbey that evening; the rest would follow later. The Lords of Pomeroy disdained to follow the world's ordinary forms and



customs, and Alice would on the morrow proceed direct to her new home.

Alice Wylde had borne up bravely. She would not allow herself to recal the past; she thought she was successfully putting the recreant Rupert from her heart; and she did her best to *like* the Lord of Pome-roy, to look forward to a happy life with him. Only, now and again, some slight incident would arise that served to bring back to memory a scene of happier days, and her whole frame would thrill with anguish. One occurred now.

"Are these flowers to go in, Miss Alice?"

"Flowers?" repeated Alice, listlessly. "What flowers? How you do worry, Theresa!"

"These, miss, that were between this tissue paper in your little drawer," replied Theresa. "Here's a rose, and a—what is it?—a white geranium, I think, Miss Alice, but they are dried up beyond knowing."

Alice turned her head to see the flowers—she had overlooked them when casting away others—and the tide of memory came rushing over her. They were the last *he* had ever given her, and too well she remembered *how* they were given; his words and his looks of love. She buried her face in her hands, and gave vent to a groan of pain.

It was all over now; he was false, and gone. Gone, never to return. The last evening they had clandestinely met, Rupert was late; when he came he had these flowers in his hand, a blush-pink rose and a white geranium, and he put them into hers. All that sweet romance was over; henceforth her heart must content itself with the most prosaic reality.

"Flowers!" she cried, indifferently, turning to



Theresa, who was on her knees before the trunk. "Some old dried things, I suppose, that have lain there and been forgotten. Throw them down with the other rubbish, Theresa."

Theresa let the flowers fall upon the carpet amidst the odds and ends of discarded things lying there. She was resuming her packing again, when her ear caught the sound of foot-steps through the open window, and she stretched up her head to look below.

"Miss Alice, here's the Lord of Pomeroy."

He had come, had he!—in spite of Mrs. Wylde's having laughingly told him that, according to rules of etiquette, a bridegroom must not see his bride on the eve of the wedding-day. It was not "etiquette" that could keep Guy Pomeroy from her he loved.

Alice knew she must go to him. And why should she not?—was he not to be her husband ere many hours had passed? But her thoughts had been turned to the events which she had latterly striven to bury, and, as she went down, an impulse arose—long afterwards she used to wonder why it should so have arisen—to speak of them to Guy. Have we not all been unaccountably swayed by such, without rhyme or reason?

Entering the room where he stood alone, waiting for her, she stopped his words of greeting and put away unconsciously his hand. It was as though some instinct compelled her to speak and as if she had not a minute left to do it in.

"Guy, did you deceive me when you told me that—that ill of Rupert?"

The Lord of Pomeroy turned his eyes upon her. "Why do you ask that now?"



"Were I to find, later, that you had deceived me, it would be bad for us both; for you and for me," she dreamily said.

"Deceived you in what respect?"

"About Sybilla Gaunt."

"The Lords of Pomeroy disdain deceit," was his reply. "The fact of Rupert's remaining away so long might convince you that he is with *her*, or with some other equally potent attraction, without any further proof."

"True, true," she murmured. "Forgive me, Guy."

Guy Pomeroy bent towards her, and would have sealed his forgiveness, but was met by a gesture of repression. "Don't, please," she faintly said, as she drew away.

A passing frown contracted Guy's face. When these little episodes peeped out, showing how utterly she disliked him, he felt at war with her, with Rupert, with the world, and with Heaven.

## CHAPTER VII.

### The Storm.

THE month by the calendar was June; the day in the first week of it: looking at the weather, it might have been pronounced November; rarely, indeed, has June seen such a day as that. But, if the weather was bad, the inhabitants of Abbeyland were unusually active and gay; all, their best attire donned, making the most of their holiday. Windows and casements seemed alive with heads; groups gathered under shelter in doorways, in the shops, and in the black-smith's forge, all



watching the road in a flutter of expectation, for Guy, Lord of Pomeroy, was to pass with his bride.

Twice already had the gazers been gratified. Once when the string of carriages, containing the bride and her friends, had gone forth to the chapel belonging to Pomeroy Abbey; and again at the conclusion of the ceremony, when they went back to the White House to breakfast, the bride then sitting by her lord in his new and handsome chariot. A chariot emblazoned with the old arms and quarterings of the Pomeroy, and drawn by four greys, splendidly caparisoned. A goodly sight, indeed: but what a day!

Fair and calm and lovely had the weather been throughout the past month, and when Abbeyland's inhabitants went to rest the previous evening it had appeared as settled as fair. In the morning, when they rose, the sky was of a dark lead colour, gloomy and threatening clouds overspread the earth like a pall, and a sighing wind swept along in mournful wails, now dropping to a low dirge, now meeting, as it seemed, from all quarters, and battling in fury. No rain fell as yet, no lightning came to terrify the timid, no thunder to appal them: but if ever the elements were gathering for warfare, they were that morning. And in this threatening weather the bride and her train went forth to the chapel at mid-day.

A bride bright and beautiful was she: and so she looked as she stood before the array of priests in her chaplet of white roses and orange-blossoms, the veil thrown back from her face, her eyes sparkling, and her cheeks flushed to brilliancy. A sign of happiness, quoth the company around, arrayed in their feathers and their laces: they little suspected that it was but



the flush of excitement, of misery if you will; or that she had disliked the Lord of Pomeroy, while she passionately loved another.

How fortunate Alice Wylde was, they deemed, to have gained that prize in the matrimonial lottery for which many had striven! And she, flighty, vain, ill-trained, worse-disciplined, disappointed in him whom she had loved, had thought she could not do better than hasten to be somebody else's wife, if only to be revenged on the false lover: and when that somebody chanced to be the Lord of Pomeroy, to be raised to whose position she might have counted the world well lost, Alice Wylde had not hesitated. Some right-minded girls might have shrunk from the indelicacy of marrying one brother when they had loved the other. Not so Alice Wylde. To be Lady of Pomeroy she would have sacrificed more than any trifling reluctance that might haunt her of that kind.

And there she knelt in the chapel by the bridegroom's side, promising to be to him ever a loving and faithful wife. The lord's sisters, Isabel, the wife of the Honourable Mr. Capel, and Joan Pomeroy, stood near her; Joan attired in smart things for once; and next to them was the bride's mother, Mrs. Wylde, resplendent in laces and satins. The greater portion of this gorgeous crowd were guests for the day only, to be entertained at the White House; where, according to popular belief, feasting was to prevail all day; and in the evening the bride and bridegroom would take up their abode at the abbey.

That such a morning should have arisen, so unnatural in the sweet month of June, struck all with dismay. We like the sun to shine at festivals. During



the ceremony in the chapel, the darkness grew deeper, a darkness rarely experienced in the day-time. His Eminence the Cardinal, who had travelled down to preside at the nuptial mass, had to rub his spectacles. The old Gothic chapel, with its narrow casements, in keeping with the Gothic abbey beside it, became so obscure that one countenance could not be distinguished from another, and when the bride was required to write her name in this book, she objected, saying that she could not see. One of the tapers used in the ceremony was brought near, and by its light she wrote what was required of her. In this gloom, at the conclusion of the ceremony, but still in no rain, the procession took its way back to the White House, where the bridal entertainments were held.

And so the hours passed; the spectators gathered in the cottages in Abbeyland feasting a little on their own score, and gossiping away the day until the last instalment of the pageantry should pass and gladden their sight.

Evening came. And with it the jarring storm that had strangely held off so long; wind, rain, thunder, lightning: in the midst of which Guy Pomeroy must bring forth his bride to conduct her to the abbey. The Lords of Pomeroy condescended not to the wedding tour, a fashion introduced of later years: the former lords had taken their brides straight from their maiden to their wedded home, and the modern lords disdained to abjure the custom.

"Why do they tarry?" uttered one good wife to a knot of neighbours, who had collected within her dwelling-house. It was that of Tom Whittaker, the second keeper, and just in the middle of the village.



Naomi Rex, from the forest, made one of them. She had been at the abbey, and in the chapel, and had now come to Whittaker's with her niece Bridget. The old woman had white satin ribbons on her cap, and Bridget was as smart as she dare be. Bridget was outside just now, since a more extended view down the road could be obtained there. "Half-past seven o' the clock," continued Rhode Whittaker, "and they were to have come forth on the stroke of the hour."

"Why, they tarry for the weather, to be sure," spoke her next neighbour.

"Nay, then they may put off their bridal garments, and Madam Wylde may just have 'em for the night, instead of the abbey," retorted Rhode Whittaker, who liked nothing so much as the sound of her own tongue. "There's no chance that this storm will slacken; the lightning may, but the rain and the wind won't; and that the Lord of Pomeroy may see for himself."

"At three o'clock, 'twas said the banquet was to be. They have had time to eat it, and another to it: why don't they come?"

"Don't be impatient, you women," exclaimed Whittaker himself, who was standing at the open door, half in, half out. "They'll come, all in time: trust the Lord of Pomeroy for that. A bad day, sir," he added, touching his hat to some one who was passing.

"Who's that you are speaking to, Tom?" asked his wife.

"Mr. Gaunt."

"Mr. Gaunt!—why where's he going, in all this storm?"

"To the abbey, I should say. He's taking that direction."



"Aunt Rhode," screamed out a girl of nineteen, "I wouldn't be married on such a day as this, if I had to stop single all my life. It bodes ill-luck."

"Hush-sh-sh!" came the prolonged caution from several lips. It was a bold tongue in Abbeyland that dared hint at ill-luck for a Pomeroy.

"There's nobody here but ourselves," returned the girl, in a subdued tone. "And I didn't send the storm. It's come, and there can't be harm in saying that it is. To me it seems to bode frightful luck."

"The same thing has been in my mind all day," whispered Naomi Rex, from the arm-chair near the fire. "When I got up this morning, and saw the dead, ghostly look of things—yes, you may question it, but they had a blue ghostly look, just as they had that day last year when the heavens were darkened for the—what was it called?—the eclipse of the sun, and the cocks set on to crow at midday. So it has looked all day since. Thought I to myself—if ever there's ill-luck meant to be foreshadowed, it must be this day, for the Lord and new Lady of Pomeroy. As Mary Lamp says, we did not send the storm; but as it is here, I see not why it should not be spoken of—and the fear it brings to thoughtful minds."

"And I just ask you all," returned the girl, delighted at being upheld in her treason by so eminent an authority as Naomi Rex, "did you ever see such lightning, or hear such thunder? Aunt Rhode knows it, though she snubs me. Hark to that peal!"

"Yes, Mary Lamp's right—it is a storm and a day altogether out of the common," assented Naomi. "Hardly a minute of this blessed day but my silent



prayers have been going up to Heaven, that the ill this too surely seems to portend may be averted."

Tom Whittaker pushed his head as far beyond the door as it would go, to have his laugh out. He did not believe in omens.

"Strange the lord didn't bring his brother, Mr. Rupert, to the wedding," cried a woman who was mounted on a chair to see the better. "Perhaps Mr. Rupert don't care for weddings."

"He'd care for the feasting that is to come after it, though. There's to be open house at the abbey for nine days to come, and the lord and the lady are to top the feasting tables."

"I wish Mr. Rupert had been the heir," exclaimed Mary Lamp enthusiastically. "He's a rare brave man to speak to, with a merry eye: but the lord's as cold as a stone."

An unlucky remark: the girl nearly got buffeted. The gay Rupert was not held in the favour that the lord was, for his faults were certainly not those of being cold or stony; and though the community did not praise him, it would not blame. Harsh tongues were let loose upon the girl.

"Thee'dst better not get within ken o' Mr. Rupert's merry eye, I can tell thee that, girl, or may be thee'dst find thy own the sadder for it," said an old man who sat in the opposite chair to Naomi.

The girl looked as though she would like to rebel. "I don't care," cried she: "you are all ready to lie down and let the lord step over you as he walks, but he's not half the pleasant lord that his father was, nor that Mr. Rupert would have made; I said no more than that, and where's the ill of it? 'Tother day he



was riding out of the bean-field, none of the grooms after him, and I pulled the gate back for him and held it wide. He rode through, as stiff as a log of wood, never so much as saying thank ye, or turning his eye to see who it was holding it."

"He is the Lord of Pomeroy, and we are his vassals," replied Mrs. Whittaker: "and you had better not talk so free, Mary Lamp. They say Miss Pomeroy leaves the abbey for good when the nine days' feasting's over; she has got her fortune, and can have her home where she likes."

"Nay, not for good," spoke up Naomi. "She'll be coming back again: she told me so 'tother day, when we were talking of Miss Isabel. You take queer fancies in your head, Rhode Whittaker."

"I only takes the fancies that folks puts into it," resentfully retorted Mrs. Whittaker. "Holy Virgin! did you see that flash?"

"Here's something else to see," cried Whittaker, putting his head round the door-post again. "They be coming at last."

In spite of the wind and the pelting rain—in spite of the forked dangerous lightning and the resounding thunder, out went the younger women, leaving the windows for the aged. Out they pressed from all parts and from all quarters, until the road seemed lined, as by magic—to see those whom they had seen hundreds of times before.

But not in their bridal attire: and that was worn now. It had not been put off. The wreath of roses and orange-blossoms were yet on the bride's head, and the flowing veil still fell behind her; but her cheeks' crimson had gone. The Lord of Pomeroy sat



by her in his towering height; she looked as a little girl beside him; and his ever-pale complexion was not a whit less ghastly than usual, and his hare-lip was only too conspicuous. But for that lip and the unnaturally white skin, he would have been a very handsome man: handsome in a degree he was now, for his features, save the upper lip, were perfectly formed, his grey eyes were beautiful, and his height and figure of noble presence.

"She's pale now," cried one of the women; "she don't like the storm."

"*I* shouldn't," put in Mary Lamp. "Is Jeffs making his horses go slow on purpose?"

"What purpose?"

"That we may see the better."

"Psha, child!" rebuked a man who was standing next her. "Don't you see that Jeffs is keeping his reins tight over 'em—a pulling of 'em in? If he let 'em get their heads, they'd be off. Look how they pant! Them dumb creatures be more frightened at a storm like this than are human people."

Jeffs, the coachman, sat on his box, seeming, indeed, to have as much as he could manage in the four grey horses. The Lords of Pomeroy always drove four-in-hand: they held postillions (in those days much in fashion) in supreme contempt: Jeffs did the same. The carriage had been waiting at the White House at seven o'clock; and the half hour after it had struck before the lord and his bride came forth.

In that space of time the horses had become thoroughly frightened by the storm, almost unmanageable; and Jeffs, keeping his own place on the hammer-cloth, was reduced to the humiliation (very great to



him) of ordering the two footmen to hold the heads of the leaders. So that this proud office, of which Jeffs had thought so much—that of driving home his lord and his new lady—had partially collapsed; the glitter and glare had been taken off it. From the time of starting from the White House, the storm seemed to grow worse with every minute, the horses to become more terrified, and Jeffs had had his hands full.

“Pray the patron saint of the Pomeroyes to keep back that lightning, or I sha’n’t master ’em!” ejaculated he to himself, just as they were passing the dwelling of Whittaker.

The patron saint was deaf to poor Jeffs. In the very next moment a flash came, worse than any preceding it. It was followed by an awful crash of thunder; the horses reared, plunged, curvetted, and finally started away like mad. The two footmen, standing up behind in purple and silver, their gold-headed canes held slantwise, bent aside in dismay to look beyond the chariot, to see whither they might be going.

“Holy Mary, help us!” uttered Jeffs. “A pretty wedding-day this is!”

And, if they were frightened, these hardy men, what must the young bride have been? She uttered a faint scream as the horses dashed onwards, started partially up, and seized the handle of the carriage-door to open it. Guy drew her down again.

“Alice, what are you thinking of? It would be certain death.”

She turned her white and terror-stricken face upon him. “Better walk to the abbey, through the storm and the rain, than be at the mercy of these wild horses.”



"They are frightened, like you, my dearest. Jeffs can manage them. See, they are slackening their speed."

"We had better walk—if we could but get out! Oh, Guy, let us walk!"

He shook his head. It was a perilous situation, growing more perilous with every flash: but their best chance, indeed, their only chance, lay in keeping quiet within the closed carriage.

"Guy, what a day!" she exclaimed, bursting into tears of present terror; while a vague, undefined feeling of dread pervaded her as to the future. "I wish we had put it off till to-morrow. Theresa suggested it when she saw what dreadful weather it was—but mamma laughed at her."

Guy Pomeroy did not answer. He hastily turned her face towards him, so that she could not see out, and held her there, as if caressingly. The horses were at their worst: now galloping, now rearing, plunging, and stamping in fury, and now galloping again, on they went. Guy sat, upright and calm, and she clung to him: the terrified footmen, putting life before etiquette, managed to get carefully down and reach terra firma. One fell as he let go his hold, the other staggered: but they were in safety. They ran after the carriage with their sticks, just as many of the spectators, who had been standing to see it pass, were also running. Jeffs had lost all command, and the horses were as furies.

The Lord of Pomeroy put his head out at the front window, and called aloud to his trusty coachman. "Jeffs, take care: tighten the left rein, or they'll



pass the turning." And down he sat again, and shielded his bride's face as before. She was shivering.

"Courage, my love," he whispered: "another minute or two, and we shall be in the more sheltered drive, close to the abbey."

Jeffs was skilful and experienced, and Jeffs "took care," as his lord enjoined; but skill and care are sometimes powerless to arrest the career of animals frightened to madness. The rein was tightened in vain; the horses would not turn on their proper path but dashed blindly forward beyond it. And those, following behind, uttered a shrill cry of despair as the horses passed it and tore onwards, for they were plunging on to a dangerous road—a road which on one side had no protection. The lord saw his danger; but he thought far less of it than of keeping its sight from *her*. She struggled her face free, in spite of him, and looked up.

"We are on the precipice!" she shrieked. "Oh, Guy, we are on the precipice!"

"Hush, hush, child!" he implored with strained lips. "If Jeffs can keep them on the road, we are safe; they will stop at the hill. Don't scream, Alice; it may increase their terror. I think the storm is somewhat abating."

Her voice died away, and she remained quiet as a lamb, hiding her face upon his breast, and clasping him with a tight, nervous clasp: in that strong form, although she did not love it, there seemed to be protection: but she shook so, that she almost caused him to shake, betraying how excessive was her alarm. The storm, that had seemed to lull for a moment, raged again in its fury, and the horses raged in theirs; now



kicking, now foaming, now rearing themselves bolt upright. Jeffs was flung from the box; and, in a second more, horses, carriage, and inmates had rolled down the precipice, on to the grass.

The fall had not been more than some few feet: had the horses gone further, it would have been much greater, for the hill gradually ascended to a height, where it overlooked the sea. The runners, their senseless shouts died away into horror-stricken silence, passed the dead body of Jeffs—dead it looked—and gazed over the side. Carriage and horses lay in a heap, an appalling mass; horses plunging, one of them shrieking. Did you ever hear the shriek of a wounded and frightened horse, reader? It is not pleasant to listen to.

Gaunt, the gamekeeper, who had been near the abbey, and had rushed forward to arrest, if possible, the horses, but was not in time, came up first; he took out his knife and cut the traces. Two of the horses would never rise again; the other two dashed away in their freedom; and then the spectator climbed up and looked in at the carriage window, the carriage lying on its side.

"Get me out," said the Lord of Pomeroy.

He was not dead, at any rate: he was bruised and shaken, and there was a deep cut on his forehead: but his poor young bride lay senseless. "She has fainted from terror," said Guy, when she was extricated from the chariot; and he gently picked her up in his arms, her light weight being but as a feather in his great strength. So would he have borne her to the abbey.

"The lord had better not," interposed Gaunt,



sensibly. "Should any bones be broken, it might do worse injury. Let a mattress be brought."

Guy Pomeroy sat down on the wet grass until the mattress should come, and held her upon him. Water was fetched, and sprinkled over her face; some one suggested that her hands should be chafed; and the gloves were drawn off. Guy took the left hand in his.

"You don't rub hard enough, sir," said Gaunt. "That gentle rubbing will do no good."

"I shall hurt her hand, with these rings on it."

"Take them off, sir."

It was not bad advice. Alice was wearing three or four. Guy took them off, and dropped them into his waistcoat pocket.

But the rubbing and the water did not restore her to consciousness. The mattress was brought and she was borne to the abbey; and still she did not revive. Mr. Norris, the surgeon, entered it as they did; and he and Guy remained alone with her. She was placed upon a table, and the surgeon bent over her, touching her in various parts, touching her head and face, bending down his ear to her mouth and heart. A frightful, terrible fear stole suddenly into Guy's breast.

"She is not dead, is she?" he gasped, controlling his voice and face to calmness.

"Oh no, she is not dead," was Mr. Norris's reply. "But I fear there may be some slight concussion of the brain."

Meanwhile poor Jeffs had been brought into the abbey and was now seated upon a couch in the housekeeper's parlour. His temporary insensibility



had soon passed away, and he had managed to walk up from the scene of the accident with the help of one of the footmen. Beyond a few bruises on the left side, the side on which he fell, and sprained wrists and an aching shoulder, Jeffs had not sustained damage. He sat there now, having been comforted with a liberal supply of some delicious cordial, and was holding forth to such of the servants as could spare time from the general confusion to gather around him. No ignominy like unto this had ever fallen upon Jeffs. To have been flung from the box when he was driving the Lord and Lady of Pomeroy home on their wedding-day, so that the horses had obtained their fling and brought on the catastrophe which had ensued, would be more than enough humiliation for his lifetime.

"I'd not ha' minded if they'd killed me, the brutes, so that I'd brought the lord home all right first," he protested earnestly, in a voice that had a sound of tears in it. "And for two o' that matchless grey team to be done for, and me spared!"

"But don't your shoulder give you pain, Jeffs—and all the rest of your injuries?" cried Bridget, who was sure to be at the top and tail of every gathering—when it afforded an opportunity for gossip.

"Drat my shoulder!—and my injuries!" retorted Jeffs, with scant gallantry. "What's my injuries, put along side o' that there pitch off the box—and of them there two sweet greys?"

"Well, I didn't mean to offend you," said Bridget soothingly, for she was a well-meaning, nice-tempered young woman, who never quarrelled with anybody. "I'm sure, Jeffs, when I saw you pass with those



horses all rearing and prancing, my heart was in my mouth. You were pulling at them, and no mistake."

"Pulling!—look at my sprained wrists," cried Jeffs, holding out his unfortunate hands. "Did you ever see horses in such a fright afore?"

"No," said Bridget, "and I never wish to see it again. Tom Whittaker said they put him in mind of tigers."

"Tom Whittaker did, did he! What right has he to call my horses tigers?"

"Well, Jeffs, I must say you are unreasonable—after all the harm the horses have done——"

"'Tain't their fault; 'twas the fault o' the storm," put in Jeffs.

"And I'm sure they were just as fierce as tigers," insisted Bridget, who liked to have the last word. "But there—take another sup, Jeffs, and comfort yourself; you'll be better to-morrow."

"My two greys won't be better," lamented Jeffs. "You'd not match that team in all the county for perfection and beauty. And for two of 'em to come to this untimely end! It'll be a'most the end of me."

"It's Aunt Naomi that's concerned," resumed the young woman. "She has been all day in the queerest state you ever saw, Jeffs—and I left her sitting in Whittaker's hearth-corner, taking no notice of anybody. The weather upset her spirits, she says, and she thinks it bad for it to have come on the wedding-day."

"Bad!" echoed Jeffs. "It's worse than bad; it's atrocious. And if the wind had a neck of its own, he'd deserve to have it wrung for him. But nobody knows where the wind comes from, nor what it is; so he can't be got at."



"Now, Jeffs, how can you be so profane!" reproved Bridget, passing over the confusion shown by the personal pronouns.

"A blowing, and a roaring, and a driving round 'em like mad, it was. It all but whistled my state cocked-hat off. A fine coming home this has been!"

Mr. Norris had good cause to remain with the Lady of Pomeroy. They could not restore her to consciousness. Throughout the whole of the night she did not revive; as the hours struck, one hour succeeding to the last, each found her in the same state. The doctor and the attendants waited round her bed, and Guy paced the rooms of the abbey, one room after another; now stealing in to the chamber and gazing on her, and now departing on his restless walk again.

And that was the ending of the Lord of Pomeroy's wedding-day.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### The Young Lady of Pomeroy.

A CONCUSSION of the brain it had proved to be, but not a dangerous one. Sooner than might have been expected, Mrs. Pomeroy grew better, was herself again, and progressing towards recovery.

The news of the accident had caused a great deal of stir and commotion in the county; and the festivities that would have taken place at the abbey were postponed. The guests that were to fill it, and who had been bidden to it for the day following the marriage, that being the Pomeroy custom, had notice sent to



them to prevent their starting. Mrs. Capel, with her husband, went to visit some friends near.

Cautious nurses were Mrs. Wylde and Joan; could attention have cured Alice, she had been well forthwith. Guy had been excluded from the room. Guy rebelled: he thought he could make as good a nurse as the best of them: but he was assured that her life depended upon her enjoying perfect tranquillity; and with such a stake in hand, Guy would have kept out of her sight for a twelvemonth. Neither would they allow Alice to speak, until she grew so much better that she would be quiet no longer.

"How long have I lain here?" at length asked she of Mrs. Wylde.

"Eight days, my dear."

"This is a strange room. Is it the abbey?"

"Of course it is. It is your own room in it."

"I was married, was I not?" continued Mrs. Pomeroy.

"Why, don't you remember it?" returned her mother.

"Yes, I remember it. I lay and thought things over yesterday, when you would not let me talk: and I remember the awful day—and oh, mother," shuddering, "I remember the drive home! I remember the furious horses, and Guy holding me. Did we fall over the precipice?"

"Only at the low part of it. The accident was a sad one," added Mrs. Wylde, "but do not recur to it now, Alice; no lives were lost. Jeffs was thought to be badly hurt at the time; but he is better. Quite well, indeed."

Mrs. Pomeroy raised herself in bed, sitting up and



looking eagerly at her mother. "Did it kill Guy?" she asked, in a whisper.

"Good gracious, no, child! Don't frighten yourself with these imaginative fancies. Lie down. The Lord of Pomeroy was not hurt—to speak of." Had it been to save her credit, Mrs. Wylde could not have helped giving Guy this title upon every possible occasion: the charm it bore for her ears was beyond telling. She could never bring herself to call him Mr. Pomeroy: but that's what he was, in spite of the title being personally accorded him. Alice resumed.

"Oh—then——Guy is well!"

"Quite well, Alice. Your beautiful white dress is the worst off."

"How so?"

"After the carriage was overturned, while your husband held you, the skirts of your dress lay in the wet and muddy grass: I'll leave you to judge the state it was in: though, indeed, I took but one glimpse at it. And the wreath was crushed, and the veil torn. Now don't talk any more."

There ensued a few minutes' pause, and then the invalid began again. Her hands were raised before her, and she appeared to be looking at them. "If I'm married, where's my wedding-ring?"

"Now, Alice, how can you talk so nonsensically? 'If I am married!' You must be putting this forgetfulness on. Don't you remember all about it?"

"I suppose I do," sighed Alice.

"Then why need you pretend not to?"

"Well, where is my wedding-ring?"

"The Lord of Pomeroy has it."

"Did Guy——"



"I will not have you talk any more," peremptorily interrupted Mrs. Wylde. "This is the first day you have been allowed to speak, and you are talking as if you were doing it for a wager. Wait until you are stronger."

As the most effectual way of carrying out her mandate, Mrs. Wylde quitted the room, leaving Alice alone. Compelled to silence, she lay and thought; her mind was very busy. By-and-by Miss Pomeroy entered.

"Joan, come here," she said; "sit down on the bed close to me. What a shocking accident this has been!"

"It has," replied Joan, not taking the place indicated, but drawing a chair forward. "But you are getting better, therefore ——"

"Joan, I want to ask you something—and now you answer me the truth; what you think, and whether I am not right. It was an awful day: a day, I should think, that has never been known, here or elsewhere, and it was an awful accident: and the days previous to it were calm and beautiful, and I daresay the days subsequent have been so. Have they?"

"Yes," replied Joan, unsuspecting of her young sister-in-law's drift. "The day following the accident arose bright and lovely as the days previous had been; showing no trace, save in the wet ground and the damaged crops, of the angry day that had intervened."

"Well, now, Joan, should you not say that it was an omen of evil to me and Guy?"

Joan would not answer: she would not refute the notion, for she disdained equivocation. Given to superstition, as were all the Pomeroyes—the very abbey itself,



with its tales and its gloom, was enough to embue them with it—she had been deducing augury of ill to her brother and his wife from the strange day and the accident it had led to; but she had kept the feeling within her own breast. Others were not so silent; and Guy had been nearly driven savage by the evil prognostications whispered around him.

"You don't speak, Joan: you will not speak: and I know what that means. Here's mamma again," she broke off, as Mrs. Wylde entered.

"Alice, the Lord of Pomeroy is coming in to pay you a visit." Alice rose up in her bed, startled; and looked hard at her mother.

"The Lord of Pomeroy! Here!"

"Yes. He is waiting now. He waylaid me in the corridor to say so."

Young Mrs. Pomeroy turned crimson to the roots of her hair. "I cannot see him here; in bed! He must wait until I am up and in my dressing-room, that will be in a day or two."

"Nonsense," returned Mrs. Wylde. "He is your husband, remember. We will dress you up in a shawl and a pretty cap to look smart for the visit. Don't be fastidious."

"I *won't* see him, then," said Mrs. Pomeroy.

"How very ridiculous! he will not eat you. Why, he wanted to make one of your nurses, Alice."

Mrs. Pomeroy looked red and very indignant. "I am astonished at you, mamma!"

"I am astonished at you," returned Mrs. Wylde. "Had this accident happened before you were married, there would have been no impropriety, even then, in his seeing you; and so everyone would say who has



any pretensions to a grain of common-sense: but under existing circumstances he has a *right* to see you, and he will exercise it. I can tell you, Alice, he is not pleased at having been kept out of your room, like a stranger; it has tried his temper and his feelings; but so much was said about your not being excited, that he yielded, and contented himself with taking a peep at you through the open door now and then."

"It is unreasonable," pouted Alice.

"You must be unreasonable yourself to say so," retorted Mrs. Wylde. "But I will leave your husband to settle that. To tell you the truth, I knew he was coming in to-day, and that's why I did not want you to fatigue yourself with talking beforehand."

Alice looked round at Joan. She was standing with compressed lips and severe expression: displeased, at least so Alice interpreted it, to hear this objection raised to a simple and, what might be called, a ceremonious visit. Guy determined, her mother determined, and Joan angry!—Alice began to think she might as well give in.

The Lord of Pomeroy entered; Mrs. Wylde and Joan retired and closed the door upon him. Alice lay, well covered up; her pretty face, made "smart" in its pretty cap, nearly buried in the pillow. Guy bent down to kiss her—which was very natural.

"Oh, don't, please," cried Alice, pushing him back with her hand, and turning her face away; "my head is not strong yet, and must not be touched." But the Lord of Pomeroy was her husband now, and chose to judge for himself: and he turned her face back again and took the kiss; took another and another, but in all gentleness. He would be far more careful of her than



she was of herself. Then he sat down, spoke a little of the intense anxiety her illness had caused him, and of his deep gratitude to Him, who is the giver of all good, for her, so far, recovery. In these quiet moments, all the gentleness in his nature in full exercise, none could help liking the Lord of Pomeroy.

Alice heard him pretty patiently. But he had hardly finished when she began to speak somewhat eagerly.

"Guy."

"What, my dearest?"

"I want you to listen to me; I am going to say something that I have been thinking of yesterday and to-day. I never was superstitious, Guy; but it is impossible to look upon what has happened without some such kind of feeling intruding."

"The accident will have no lasting consequences," interrupted Guy Pomeroy, possibly doomed, as it appeared, to hear reiterated by his bride the same song he had been obliged to hear from others.

"The accident was awful," she rejoined, with a shudder. "Oh, Guy! I never shall forget the terror I felt at the snorting and flying horses. How could you maintain your presence of mind?"

"I had you with me."

"I look not so much at the accident itself, as at the strange, wild day," she resumed. "The weather has never been like that. We have had summer storms, terrific storms, fatal to property and to life, but they have come on naturally, Guy, and have cleared again after they had spent themselves. But that strange day was unnatural."

"It was uncommon," said the Lord of Pomeroy.



"Guy, it was unnatural. It seemed to be sent as a warning to us. To us."

"A warning to us?"

"Yes. Not to enter into our union: the very heavens lowered their displeasure upon it."

"Alice!" returned the lord, in a tone of vexation and rebuke. "Who has been putting these notions into your head?"

"Not anyone," she answered. "Mamma and Joan have kept me silent, not allowing me to speak, or speaking to me. I could not shut my eyes to the weather, Guy. I told Joan, just now, that it was a bad omen for you and for me. She would not answer me."

"Joan was right."

"Perhaps so—but I know what she thinks. You are a man, Guy, and therefore will pretend to despise these fears; perhaps you do despise them: but, rely upon it, that strange day was sent to portend ill to us, if ever ill was portended yet."

"Then, my dear, we will ward off the ill together. I will ward all ill from you, heaven helping me."

"We can ward it off in one way," said Alice: "it is the only way left to us."

"Well?" returned Guy, smiling.

"By never being more to each other than we are now," she whispered: "by getting the marriage annulled."

"What!" uttered Guy, a frown of mingled pain and astonishment displacing the smile upon his face.

"It could be done, Guy. And then we may laugh at the past storm, and have no fears."

"Your head must be still light from fever, Alice!"



She put out her left hand and clasped his arm. "Do not let us tempt Fate, Guy. That day was as surely an omen of ill upon our union; as sure—as sure as anything can be in this world. And in what other light could the accident to me be regarded, but as an awful veto upon my entering the abbey as its mistress?"

Guy was holding her hand between his, playing with her fingers. "It should have come sooner, then, if it had that intention," said he, gaily. "Do you see this?"

He held up her hand, so that she might look at it: he had slipped on her wedding-ring. Alice strove to draw her hand away.

"Had Fate—as you call it—wished to interpose her veto upon your entering the abbey, she should have been rather more prompt, and not have waited until you were my wife."

"To treat it in that mocking way, Guy, is—wicked."

"Nay, my dear, I say nothing but the truth. If Fate, human or hobgoblin, owed us a grudge, and set herself to scowl upon our marriage, she should not have been quite so dilatory. The interposition should have come before you quitted your mother's house and your mother's name."

"It is not too late, Guy: it may be managed. When I am well enough to be moved, I can go back home with my mother."

Guy did his best to keep his anger within bounds. "Alice, you talk like a child. After having married me, come home to me, stopped with me, you think you could go back from it all, and become Alice Wylde



again! What would the world say of you? Nothing laudable, I ween."

"You are cruel," was her tearful response. "I thought the Lord of Pomeroy deemed himself a gentleman."

"I hope he is one. But he is your husband."

"My days will be a long dread of dreamy fear," she continued in agitation. "Let the world say what it will, I shall leave the abbey as I came into it."

"For shame, Alice!" Guy's temper was rising.

"The marriage can be easily broken," she persisted, "for the Pomeroy influence is great in Rome: and you know, Guy, my heart never was in it. You shall wed a better wife, and I will be Alice Wylde again."

One of the haughty Pomeroy scowls came over the lord's face. "That you may seek, and wed, the renegade Rupert—who won your heart with his false vows, and carried its tales of credulity to amuse his real idol! who—who——"

Guy paused: his anger had overmastered him, but his senses were returning: in a calmer moment he would have bitten his tongue out, rather than have so taunted her, now she was his wife. He had never thought to speak the name of Rupert to her again: he wished it to be equally shunned by the one as by the other.

"You are generous!" she returned, speaking with scorn to keep down the tears. "Were I free as air, and Rupert Pomeroy came to me in his soul's repentance, pleading for love and pardon, I would trample him under foot, rather than listen to him. Had I a



hope now to give to Rupert I should never have consented to marry you."

The Lord of Pomeroy rose; his passion had changed to calmness. "I beg your pardon," he softly whispered: "in this interview we have both something to forgive the other. You should not so have spoken, Alice: my wife you have been made by your own vows, and my wife you are. Anyone less ignorant of the ways of the world than you are, would never have thought of such a thing as parting now."

She burst into tears. "I am sure they all think we shall have dreadful luck."

"Oh, child, do not speak so! Not if I can shield you from it."

"You just ask Joan. And Theresa comes in with a face as glum as an owl's."

"Laugh at them. I certainly should have thought, Alice, you were above any such superstition. Dry your tears."

"This excitement may make me worse again, Guy."

"I should grieve for that. I am going, and I will send your mother to you. But when I come in again, my dearest, meet me as a friend; not as a foe."

He bent down and kissed her face, as he had done at entering, and quitted the room. Mrs. Wylde came into it, but Alice motioned her away, and said she was going to sleep: so she was left alone.

Droll sleep it was: a prolonged fit of sobs and tears. But Guy had left upon her hand the wedding-ring: a sure earnest that she could not go from him.

Mrs. Wylde caught just the two first syllables of



the word, separation, and was for applying a couple of blisters behind her daughter's ears, seriously believing her brain must be affected; she told her she deserved a good shaking for even imagining so great a scandal. Let her say it again, and she and Miss Pomeroy would quit the abbey, leaving nobody to nurse her but Guy. It seemed that Alice had no choice left her.

But, ignorant though Alice might be in the world's ways, as her husband had just assumed, she was quite an adept in many little petty wiles and ruses: and she contrived to spin out the "getting well" to a period that Guy thought interminable. At length, Mrs. Wylde quitted the abbey, leaving a good private scolding for Alice behind her. Joan Pomeroy went to join her sister, Mrs. Capel, on the visit the latter was paying—both of them to return to the abbey in a few days; and Alice, fully restored to health, even in her own estimation, assumed her proper station as the abbey's mistress.

And then Guy filled it with the guests that had been expecting to come ever since the wedding. Feasting was the order of the day; gaiety reigned; dinners, drives, dressing, and vanity. In the midst of this, all so dear to her pleasure-loving heart, Alice was forgetting her fears of evil; and if she was not precisely in the seventh heaven of happiness as the wife of Guy, she was certainly not miserable. She loved gaiety; and the deference paid her, both as a bride and as the Lady of Pomeroy, turned her head with pleasure. The women envied, the men admired, Guy loved; and Alice Pomeroy's life was as one long dream of indulged vanity.



"Which is best, Lady of Pomeroy," Guy said to her one day, laughingly: "to reign here, the abbey's mistress and my idolized wife, or to have gone back home again to be Alice Wylde?"

"I was ill and weak, dear Guy," she pleaded, "and the storm had so frightened me. I am glad to be here."

"You shall always be glad, my dearest, if it depend on me," whispered Guy. And Alice turned to him with a loving look, and a loving word. She had resolutely set herself to overcome the distaste she felt for him, and she was succeeding.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Joan," spoke the Honourable Mrs. Capel, one day when the two sisters were together in the garden, "I do not like our new sister-in-law."

"No?" said Joan.

"Not at all. Do you?"

The question was pointedly put. In her heart of hearts, Joan did not like Alice Pomeroy, had never been able (in spite of her efforts) to bring herself to like her when she was Alice Wylde. But Joan was all for peace, for making the best of things, and therefore felt very unwilling to confess as much, even in confidence.

"And I wonder at Guy's infatuation," added Mrs. Capel.

"Do you, Isabel? Alice is very pretty."

"Pretty!" cried Mrs. Capel, slightly tossing her head. "What of that? So are other people."

Possibly by "other people" she meant herself. Certainly the two sisters presented a contrast in looks. Isabel lively and beautiful; Joan grave of manner,



hard of feature, and too tall for a woman. The one liked dress; the other shunned it. Look at them to-day: Isabel wears a delicate silk (too costly for her purse) that gleams and changes in the sun; Joan has on some delectable thick dull material of the sober colour she favours—dark purple.

"Guy might have chosen as pretty a girl as she is; aye, and prettier," continued Mrs. Capel. "For my part, I don't think she is so very pretty; I don't much like her face. But I suppose her fortune tempted him."

"The fortune is of course a good thing. But I am sure of this much, Isabel: that had she not possessed a penny piece, Guy would have married her."

"In his infatuation, I daresay he would. When once a man loves in the impassioned manner that Guy, as it is too evident, does love, he rarely takes expediency into consideration."

"Why do you not like her, Isabel?"

"Because I don't," laughed Mrs. Capel. "If that's not a sufficient reason, Joan, I hardly know that I can give another. There's something about her that jars against me: something that tells me she is not truthful; and certainly she is not a lady at heart. Do you remember that little girl who used to come here from the convent, Joan?"

"Which little girl? Several have come."

"Rosa Peters. Well, she had no beauty, had she?—but she had a gentle, genuine, honest face, the reflection of a true and guileless heart. I should have liked Guy to choose her: and at one time I thought he seemed inclined to do it."

"*Did* you think so?" cried Joan in surprise. "Rely



upon it Guy never thought of her in that way. I don't believe he has ever had a thought of anyone except Alice Wylde. Rosa Peters was a nice girl; we rarely see one so desirable. Yes, I wish she could have been Guy's wife. But, Isabel——"

"Well?"

"Alice is his wife: and though we may not like her as well as we could wish, only one thing remains—to make the best of it."

"Quite right—especially for you, who will see more of her than I shall. My dear Joan, had he married a negress you would have said, Make the best of it."

"I daresay we shall like her in time—when she has shaken down into her place, and——"

"Become less assumptious, you would say. Is that a right word? Anyway, you know what I mean. She is eaten up with vanity: as her mother is with pretension. I don't believe the woman has ever before mixed with people of degree. But there—you need not knit your brow, Joan; all the talking in the world will not undo the marriage, so we'll just leave it. Guy has chosen this girl with his eyes open; and I hope with all my heart she will make him happy. Do you know whom I met this morning?"

"No."

"Gaunt. In coming home from matins, I walked round the keep, taking a look at the old place, and Gaunt was crossing the field on the other side. It is the first time I have seen him since I came."

"Did you speak to him? Did you ask about Sybilla?"

"I spoke of course: I did not like to ask about her. But now, Joan, where is Sybilla?"



Miss Pomeroy shook her head. She wished she knew.

"Can it be true that she lost her head?"

"Yes. Unfortunately."

"Well, I don't believe it."

"Not believe it?"

"No; I can't believe it of Sybilla Gaunt. I don't think the Lady Abbess believes it. Or Sister Mildred, either. When I was at the convent yesterday, I spoke of her."

"And what did they say?"

"Nothing. They would not speak of her at all. But when I said I could not and would not believe the dreadful ill that was reported of her, they both looked as if they approved my words."

"Yes, in their charity," said Joan, in a low tone. "*There's no room to doubt, Isabel*; I tell it you: and I would almost as soon have had to tell it of myself."

"Where's Rupert?" resumed Mrs. Capel sharply.

"In London—and in some trouble, I fear."

"Debt, of course. It will always be so with Rupert. But—is it true that he and Sybilla left together?"

"No, that's not true. About the time Sybilla left, Rupert went somewhere, and was absent for a day or two; but he came back again."

"For a short while only, though. What does Guy say to it all?"

"Nothing. He will not allow the subject to be mentioned. I can see that, for some cause or other, his heart is waging war with Rupert."

"I have no patience with Rupert. He is too thought-



less; he does not care what scrapes he gets himself or others into."

Joan sighed. They had wandered to the edge of the lake, and Mrs. Capel was tossing some bits of biscuit to the swans. "Have you heard lately from India—from George?" she asked.

"Not very lately," replied Joan. "George was never a good correspondent. I wish his regiment had not been ordered to India! I wish he could have been here at the wedding! Leolin could not come either. It did not seem right for the Lord of Pomeroy to be unattended by any of his brothers."

"Dear George! I should so much like to see him once again! He is the best of them all, Joan."

Joan did not answer. She loved her brother George dearly, and was grieved that he should have gone away, perhaps for years. Her eyes had a far-off look in them, as they gazed at the narrow strip of blue sky seen above the high enclosing walls of the shrubbery, to which they had walked back, just as though she could see India up there.

"Guy is cold and domineering, Rupert fonder of the world than of home, Leolin just the least bit in the world selfish," went on Mrs. Capel, summing up the virtues of her brothers; "but George is good and winsome. And yet he is the one that must go away from us over the seas."

"It is ever thus, I think," said Joan. "Any pleasure we particularly wish for in this life is sure to be marred. George is the one brother we would have liked to keep near us, and therefore George is the one to go away."

On this same morning, it chanced that Alice



Pomeroy with two of her younger guests was in her own special sitting-room; one that Guy had re-decorated so charmingly for his expected bride. Alice had informed him she did not like dull and gloomy rooms; so, to please her, he made this into a modern one. It was vastly pretty, no doubt; with its pink silk hangings, its mirrors and its nick-nacks, and it pleased Alice's eye: but it was sadly out of keeping with the grand and sombre old abbey.

Lady Lucy Hetley, a pretty girl, daughter of the Earl of Essington, sat on the music-stool, talking and playing by turns; Miss Peters (she was a cousin to the Rosa Peters spoken of by Mrs. Capel) was standing at the window, some embroidery in her hand; and Alice lay back at ease in a costly arm-chair slightly swaying one foot about, and doing nothing.

"And what became of the pattern?" asked Lady Lucy of Mary Peters, who was telling them a tale of her convent life.

"We never knew what became of it," was the answer. "It disappeared, and that was all that could be said. Sister Mildred thought it so suspicious that she felt herself obliged to acquaint the Lady Abbess. The dear good mother came into the recreation room and searched about for it herself."

"Suspicious in what way?" questioned Alice.

"Well, she thought that one or other of the girls must have hidden the pattern to avoid doing the work. Eight of us were told off to do it. It was the most elaborate lace pattern I ever saw; quite half a yard in depth, and would have taken us some months to do."

Alice laughed. "And so, one of you got afraid



of the work and hid the pattern! I think I should have done so myself. Were you the culprit, Mary?"

"I!" cried Miss Peters, lifting her frank eyes in surprise. "I would not play such a trick for the world. I was longing to begin the work: there is nothing I like doing so much as fine lace work."

"I began a piece once," said Lucy Hetley, "but never got to the end of it. I think all fine work tedious—and it ruins the eyesight."

"Not when the eyes are young," dissented Mary Peters. "Well, the trick did not serve us—if it was a trick—for the nuns produced a more intricate pattern than even the first; and we worked that. The Lady Abbess, she is always so good and kind, thought that the one might have been torn up inadvertently by the lay-sister who was in charge that week of the room."

"What was the dress for? The chapel?"

"No no, Lucy; not the chapel. It was for Charlotte Hornyacke's wedding-dress. She was a great favourite at the convent. When we heard, soon after she left it, that she was engaged to be married, the nuns thought that they should like to make her some useful present—for the Hornyackes are not rich, you know; and they fixed upon a lace dress for the wedding. At first the Sisters meant to work it themselves, but a few of us begged that we might do it: so they worked the veil."

"How did the dress look?"

"Oh, lovely. It was the most beautiful dress of the kind I ever saw. If ever I am married I should like just such a one."

"Of course she wore it over white silk?"



"Of course. Do you know, I like lace for a bride better than silk or satin."

"I am not sure but I do," observed Lucy. "What was your wedding-dress?" she added, turning to Alice. For neither of these young ladies had been present at the ceremony: indeed, Lucy Hetley was only now brought by some friends for a day or two.

"Mine? Oh, mine was rich white silk with lace and flowers."

"Why don't you show it to us, Mrs. Pomeroy?"

"I will if you like. Come into my dressing-room," added Alice; and they all ran to it together.

"I suppose it must be somewhere here," remarked Alice, opening drawers and wardrobes; "but I declare I've never thought of the dress since my wedding-day. I fancy mamma said something about its having been hurt by the wet."

"No wonder you have not thought of it—with such a termination as the day had," said Mary Peters. "I think I should have died of fright in the carriage."

"Oh, you can't imagine what it was!" returned Alice, slightly shuddering. "What with the dreadful storm and the furious horses, I—I don't know how I lived through it. Guy turned my face down upon him and kept it there, so that I should not see. But for him I should have jumped out of the carriage. I have often wondered since that Guy could have been so calm himself."

"Was he calm?"

"Perfectly so. I asked him one day how he could have maintained it in so dreadful a scene, and he said it was because he had me with him. When we have anyone weaker than ourselves to protect, it stimulates



us to courage, you know. But now—where can my dress be?—where have they put it? I must ring for Theresa."

Theresa came in, quiet-looking as usual, in her close cap and neat grey gown. When she was asked about the wedding-dress, she seemed to be in nearly as great a puzzle as her mistress.

"I'm sure, my lady, I don't know where it can be," she said, looking round in reflection. "It must have been taken off after you were brought in, but I really do not know what was done with it."

"Then you ought to know," cried Alice in her quick way.

"I did not help to take it off, I was down stairs getting the hot water, and things," pleaded Theresa. "I don't think I saw the dress, or remembered to ask about it. We were all in so much concern about you, madam, that perhaps my forgetfulness was excusable. I'll enquire of Mrs. Rex."

Yes. Mrs. Rex knew. Mrs. Rex had helped Mr. Norris and the lord to take off the dress, and then had, herself, hung it up in the large wardrobe closet near the end of the wing. At this news, away went the three young ladies to the closet, and Mrs. Pomeroy threw open the door.

It was hanging just in front of them as they entered; the once beautiful dress of rich white silk, with its costly white lace flounces, now shrunken, muddy, and yellow, with the wet and dirt. The three ladies stood contemplating it with dismayed faces.

"What a sad pity!" breathed Miss Peters.

"But the flounces do not seem torn; at least, they



are not on this side," observed Lady Lucy. "They might be cleaned and renovated."

She turned the skirt slightly, and bent forward to look further. Something must have startled her, for she dropped it suddenly and drew back with a faint scream.

"It is covered in blood," she shuddered, turning her pale face towards Mrs. Pomeroy.

"In blood!"

"A long stream all down it. I—I don't like to see blood."

Curiosity, even to look at disagreeable sights, is irrepressible, and both Mrs. Pomeroy and Mary Peters pressed forward to look. It was as Lucy Hetley said: a long, dark, ugly stain. They shut the closet door in trepidation, almost as though they were shutting in a ghost, turned the key, and hastened back to the dressing-room.

"I can't account for it—for what should bring that mark there; I cannot understand it one bit," spoke Alice Pomeroy from the low chair on which she had sunk down.

"You must have been wounded."

"But I was not wounded. Nothing was hurt but my head, and that did not bleed. It must have come on the dress in the closet."

This sounded so ghostly a suggestion, carrying them back to the times of Mrs. Radcliffe and all kinds of unearthly thoughts, that the young ladies drew closely together, although it was broad daylight.

"I would put it in the fire and burn it," cried Lucy Hetley. "I should think it ominous to see that stain on my wedding-dress."



What with facts and suggestions, the young Lady of Pomeroy was feeling somewhat uncomfortable. Whilst her mother was of a practical unimaginitive nature, she was the contrary: dormant in her heart lay the seeds of a superstition that might be nourished in time to become formidable.

"Do you know anything about the stain on my dress, Theresa?" she lifted her head to ask.

"My lady, no. When they carried you in, you were covered with the red silk counterpane that had been taken out with the mattress."

Mrs. Pomeroy went off impulsively in search of her husband. He was alone in the library, writing a letter. Alice stood behind his chair, and laid her hand upon his shoulder.

"Guy, how did that—that frightful stain come upon my bridal dress? Do you know?"

Guy laid down his pen, and drew the hand to him with a caressing movement. "What stain, my darling?"

"Of blood," she whispered. "A long, frightful stain all down it. The dress is altogether spoiled."

"Won't it wash?"

"Wash!" she exclaimed, amazed at the ignorance of mankind. "But we can't think where it came from, Guy. I was not wounded."

"I was," replied Guy. He pushed aside the hair from his right temple and exhibited a mark that he would retain for life.

"That is where it came from, Alice: it bled freely. As I held you on the bank, the blood ran down upon your dress without my observing it."

She heaved a sigh of relief. "Oh yes, that's how



it was, then. We have been thinking it must have got on of itself in the closet. Such things have been heard of, you know, Guy. The old story-books are full of them."

"I'm sure I don't know," said Guy, laughing. "Never mind your spoiled dress, love: we will buy you another."

"Ah, Guy—you cannot buy me another wedding-dress," she answered, a strange mournfulness in her tone. "It is a sad pity that that stain should have come upon it: and—and all things bode ill-luck together."

"You foolish girl: you silly, silly child," he uttered fondly. "My coat came off the worst. As to ill-luck—you are a Pomeroy now. And ill-luck is a thing we don't think about, we Pomeroyes."

## CHAPTER IX.

### The Prediction.

THE marriage festivities came to an end; the guests departed, and Pomeroy Abbey returned to its usual state of quietness. Joan Pomeroy had accompanied Mrs. Capel to her home; and the young Lady of Pomeroy was alone.

She did not like to be alone. She liked show and state and glitter and excitement. The abbey had been filled with these desirable acquisitions when she married Guy Pomeroy: in fact, it may with justice be said that she married him to obtain them. It was all very well to be the Lady of Pomeroy; to be conscious that she filled that exalted position in the county; to



be called "my lady" by the servants more often than "madam:" very gratifying indeed, all this, to her vain heart; but she craved for something more.

According to the programme laid down before the marriage, Guy was to have taken his wife to town, when the festivities were over, that she might be presented at a drawing-room to be held late in June. How eagerly Alice Wylde had anticipated this, how covetously looked forward to it, she alone knew. To be presented at court seemed to her to be one of the few great and desirable and hitherto unattainable ends of this life; for we are writing of many years ago, when it was not the custom for every Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Jones and Mrs. Brown to intrude themselves there. Of all the honours she expected to drop into by her marriage with the Lord of Pomeroy, that was looked upon as the chiefest; and it was the one she most ardently hungered for.

But now—see how fate and fortune cheat us! Anything so intensely coveted as Alice coveted that, is, all too often, never realised. Some adverse cross or other is sure to step in and frustrate it. In this case it was the illness arising from the accident on the wedding-day. Long before the guests had come and gone after her recovery, the Queen's drawing-rooms were over. Alice would fain have gone to London all the same; but Guy laughed at her: his wife could not make her appearance there at the tail of the season, he said; and when half the families had already left it. And so, Alice perforce stayed where she was, and made the best of Pomeroy Abbey. But, as day succeeded to day, week to week, and month to month, she grew to find it insufferably dull.



Take to-day as a specimen. It is a gloomy day late in November, just on a par with the gloomy abbey itself, and Alice feels bored to death. Guy went out shooting with early morning; he may come in to luncheon, or he may not; there's no telling; and Alice sits at the window and looks out on the dreary landscape—dreary it ever seems to her. She is dressed to perfection: a gown of soft grey cashmere, trimmed very much with pink silk, and a coquettish cap of pink ribbon and white lace upon her pretty hair. But where's the use of being dressed to perfection when no admiring eyes are near to view it?—the question rang grumblingly through Alice's thoughts rather too often. She is not reading; she is not working. The latter she detests; the former also—unless, indeed, it be an especially foolish novel, one of those poor and silly ones that a mind of ordinary intellect can hardly bear to read. In dressing, flirting, and vapid speech she was an adept; but these will not carry a woman happily through life. Alice's intellect was, in truth, not of the highest order: but Guy had not yet found it out. That he would discover it fast enough in time was to be supposed; for he was clever himself, and she could never be a companion to him. Now and then he did already think her rather silly.

“Why can't they address me as Lady Pomeroy?” she said to him one day in a fractious tone, upon receiving a note whose superscription did not please her.

“Because you are not Lady Pomeroy, Alice. You are Mrs. Pomeroy.”

“You are addressed as the Lord of Pomeroy?”

“I am always so addressed in writing. You may



be addressed as the Lady of Pomeroy, or as Mrs. Pomeroy—as people please.”

“Then I don’t like to be addressed as Mrs. Pomeroy,” pouted Alice. “I ought to be Lady Pomeroy.”

“Don’t be silly, child,” said Guy, slightly knitting his brow. “The title is personally accorded me in courtesy and from long-established usage; it does not confer any benefit on those connected with me.”

This was not a solitary instance—but others need not be mentioned. And we return to Alice, seated in her salon on the dark November day.

“Oh, dear!” she cried, with a prolonged yawn, “how dull everything is!”

Mrs. Pomeroy was not feeling well, or fancied so, which tended to increase her lassitude. Only yesterday she complained to her mother, who told her she must be patient; her indisposition might probably have a cause. But there sits Alice to-day, feeling out of sorts, dreary, dull, and with nothing in the world to do.

“Theresa,” she called out, as a footstep passed the half-open door.

But it was the housekeeper who looked in. “It is not Theresa,” Mrs. Rex said. “Does the lady require anything that I can do?”

“Where is Theresa?”

“She is gone over to the White House, my lady.”

“What a long time she stays there! She ought to have been back ever so long ago. No, I don’t want anything. Send Theresa in when she does come.”

Mrs. Rex met Theresa in the corridor. “Your lady is asking for you,” she said to her. “Go in at once, for she seems impatient.”



"My lady always is impatient now," thought Theresa. "I suppose I may take off my bonnet first."

"Well, what news have you?" began Alice sharply, as the maid appeared. "How is mamma?"

"She is quite well, madam, and sends her love to you. As to news, I have not brought any."

"Did you get the bracelet?"

"No, madam, and they can't find it anywhere. Mrs. Wylde thinks you must have dropped it in getting into the carriage, or on getting out of it. She says she saw it on your arm when the lord was putting on your opera cloak in the hall."

The previous evening Alice and Guy had dined with Mrs. Wylde. After her return home, when undressing, Alice missed one of her bracelets. It was a band of filigree gold, the clasp set with pearls. After breakfast this morning, she had despatched Theresa to the White House, believing she must have left it there.

"Mamma says she saw it on my arm when my cloak was being put on, does she? I daresay I dropped it in the hall. I daresay they have not half looked there for it."

"Indeed, my lady, we looked well; looked in every crick and corner of it. The lord said just now——"

"Have you seen the lord?" interrupted Alice.

"He was crossing the upper field with Mr. Gaunt and the two keepers as I left the White House," explained Theresa. "I told him that the bracelet was not found, and he said it had occurred to his memory that, in coming home last night, you put your arm out of the carriage window to feel whether it still rained. He thinks it may have dropped off then."



"Did I?" said Alice; "I'm sure I forget. If it did drop off then, some thief may have picked it up."

"And the lord desired me to say that he should not be in to luncheon, madam," added Theresa, as she withdrew. "They were going to beat some of the upper covers."

The Lady of Pomeroy sat on again, yawning and sighing and looking at the dreary landscape till lunch time. That meal, sat at partly for form's sake, for the appetite was not as good as it used to be, she returned to her place in the morning-room, and yawned through the afternoon, done to death nearly with ennui, at the lack of something to do. She had no resources within herself; she seemed to have no object to live for.

Towards dusk the lost bracelet was brought in. One of the village labourers, going forth in the morning to his day's work, had picked it up in the highway: dropped there no doubt when she had put her arm out of the carriage the previous evening.

And thus the time, the days and the weeks, interspersed with a little receiving and visiting, contrived to pass for Mrs. Pomeroy. The visiting might have been more extensive, but that somehow or other she was not so popular as she might have been. Whether it was that the old county families resented her want of birth, and regarded her as somewhat of an interloper amongst them; or whether it was *herself* they did not like, certain it was, that Alice was not courted so much as one might have expected the Lord of Pomeroy's wife to be.

The winter passed, spring followed, and summer came round again. There is little of event to tell that



could interest the reader. Joan had continued with her sister Isabel.

Once more a grievous disappointment fell on Alice Pomeroy. The delicate health, before hinted at, had but increased; increased to so great a degree of daily discomfort that her intention of going to London, for her presentation in the spring, was utterly out of the question, and had again to be postponed. Visiting abroad and entertaining guests at home had alike to be given up by her, for she could do nothing but nurse herself and her sickness. But Guy was in a wondrous flow of spirits, for there was expected an heir to Pomeroy. Thus the anniversary of their wedding-day came round again.

One evening soon after this, when Guy was dining out, Alice, after her own dinner, went into the oak-room, which faced the quadrangle. The sun was setting in a sky of crimson and gold: Alice could see the brightness over the opposite side of the abbey—the haunted west wing. Mrs. Pomeroy's thoughts wandered to the vast extent of the abbey—what an army of servants it must have taken to fill it when fully inhabited in the days gone by! She remembered a boast she had once made—that, should she ever be the abbey's mistress, she would cause it to be renovated, so that the county should not know it again. Opposite to her lay the west wing and tower, with whose rooms superstition made itself so busy. Those rooms she had never seen. A sudden inclination came over her to look at them now, this very evening. More than once she had asked Guy to take her over those rooms; he always answered that he would on the first convenient opportunity—but somehow the opportunity had never



come. One grave request he had made to her; nay, it was a command—*that she would not attempt to go up without him.* This came into her mind now.

“As if it could signify,” decided Alice at last, after pondering the matter for a few minutes. “Guy’s only afraid I should hurt myself, traversing those narrow stairs without him: I daresay they *are* narrow and awkward. Yes, I will go; and old Jerome must attend me with the keys.”

Jerome, summoned by his lady to show her over the west wing, appeared in a state of intense astonishment, holding in his hand a huge bunch of keys. He was custodian of the abbey.

“Had not the lady better defer her visit till the morrow?” asked Jerome. “It will soon be dark.”

“Not at all, Jerome: I am going now,” answered Mrs. Pomeroy.

They proceeded through the cloisters of the north wing, to the north tower. Jerome fumbled over his keys; and, unlocking the door, they ascended the staircase, which was narrow, of the tower, Mrs. Pomeroy folding her skirts closely around her, and from thence passed into the west wing. There was no other mode of entrance to the west wing and the west tower, save this.

Peering about her in the dim light, Mrs. Pomeroy saw, as she and Jerome passed through these rooms, that they yet bore some scant remains of furniture, though the hangings were dropping to pieces. When they came to the last room—Jerome called it so—Mrs. Pomeroy detected a small door at its end covered with tapestry.



"Jerome," she exclaimed, "this must lead into the west tower."

The old man had turned to one of the windows, and was looking steadfastly down into the court. Mrs. Pomeroy repeated her remark. "This door, Jerome. Open it."

"That room is never entered," he replied.

"Never entered!" returned Mrs. Pomeroy. "Why not? I shall enter it."

"I have not the key," avowed Jerome.

"Where is it, then?"

Jerome hesitated. "Maybe—maybe the lord keeps it. That's the haunted room, madam."

Mrs. Pomeroy had heard of the haunted room, both before she entered the abbey and since. Not being so much of a believer in immaterial bodies as she was in weather-signs and such-like omens, she became possessed with a strong desire to explore it.

"Has the lady never heard that apparitions have been seen there?" returned Jerome, in a tone of awe.

"Apparitions don't come before night sets in," promptly replied the Lady of Pomeroy. "You go back, Jerome, and hunt among all that heap of keys in that key-closet of yours, and find the right one."

Jerome had no power to say he would not go. He turned unwillingly, and attempted to take with him the bunch of keys which hung to the lock; the lock of the room they were in. No: try as he would, he could not take it: the key, that he had himself put into the lock, adhered to it.

"I think this key will only come out when the door's closed and locked," muttered Jerome, trying ineffectually still.



He went away at length. Mrs. Pomeroy, as much to pass the time as anything, touched the keys, and out they came. "What a curious thing that Jerome could not do it!" thought she. "They seemed to fall out, into my hand. That old man must be getting stupid."

She held them, and read their labels, which indicated the particular room each key belonged to. On one, however, was simply written "The Key." "The key?" debated Mrs. Pomeroy: "that must be the key of the haunted room, I should think. I'll try it."

She drew aside the hangings, inserted it in the lock, and, with a harsh, grating sound, the door flew open, the wind and the dust blowing unpleasantly in the face of Mrs. Pomeroy.

She shrank back. Her courage failed. By daylight or by dark, it is not pleasant to a mind where any superstition exists to enter alone a "haunted" room. Mrs. Pomeroy went back to the casement and stood looking into the court. There she saw Bridget: obeying an impulse, she pulled open, with some trouble, the casement, trellised with its small panes, and signed to her to come up. Bridget was a native of Abbeyland, a daughter of one of the three brothers Rex, who had all, when living, been faithful followers of the late Lord of Pomeroy, and she knew all the traditions relating to the family. She looked thunder-struck at seeing her lady there, but obeyed the signal: came through the north cloisters, ascended the stairs of the tower, passed through the rooms, and joined her.

"Hold these hangings back for me," said Mrs. Pomeroy. "They are nothing but a cloud of dust."



The woman obeyed, but with a wondering gesture. "Does the Lady of Pomeroy know what this room is?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Pomeroy, passing in. "Come with me, Bridget."

It was a small, circular room, panelled with dark oak. A narrow casement faced the quadrangle; but, like the other rooms, there was no look-out to the opposite side, the open country. The room was completely furnished with velvet that had once been red, but was now dark with age; chairs, a broad couch or settle, and a centre table, all were covered and hung with the velvet, which appeared to be dropping away. Mrs. Pomeroy saw no signs of haunting apparitions: all that struck her was the smallness of the room. She remarked upon it.

"The tower walls are thick, madam."

"What is that?" she asked, as her eye became accustomed to the dark walls. "Why, that is a cloth, a velvet cloth, drawn over one of the panels."

"The picture is underneath," whispered Bridget.

"What picture is underneath?"

"The nun's, madam: she who was said to haunt the room. Would the lady like to look at it?"

Mrs. Pomeroy signified her assent. Bridget caught up the velvet and held it aside, disclosing a half-length figure, habited as a nun. The face was young, fair, and most lovely; but a strangely mournful and stern expression sat in the dark blue eyes, which were fixed full on the spectator. The lips were slightly open, and one delicate hand was held up in a warning attitude.

"She is saying 'Beware,'" whispered Bridget, who appeared to be afraid of the picture hearing her.



Mrs. Pomeroy laughed. "Fancy goes a great way. Beware of what?"

"It is what she is supposed to be saying, madam, according to the tradition. But why, or to whom she is saying it, has never been decided."

"What is her history?"

"She lived in the reign of one of the Georges—the first or second, I think," began Bridget, delighted at having to tell the tale. "She was brought up in the convent and had taken the veil, though only seventeen, when in some way she fell in with him who was then Lord of Pomeroy. It was said to be in the fire, for the convent was partly burnt down, and the nuns had to escape in the night."

"Was it this convent?—our convent?" interrupted Mrs. Pomeroy. "That we can see from here?"

"Yes, madam, this very convent. Though nigh upon a hundred years must have elapsed, the sisters there will tell you tales now that have come down to them of that trying misfortune. This young nun forgot her vows, madam, and ran away with the Lord of Pomeroy, to be his wife. He married her in secret, and he brought her to these rooms, this tower room being hers. The lord doted on her, it is said, and he had this picture taken of her in her convent dress, and hung up here: but, when it was too late, she found out he had played her false, for he had a wife already, that he was separated from. She went crazed, poor thing, all in one night, and she threw herself out of this very window, and was taken up dead in the court below."

Mrs. Pomeroy looked at the window. "She never



could get through that narrow half casement, Bridget. The other half does not open."

"It is certain that she did, madam: she was young and slight: and perhaps the other half opened then. For years afterwards, during that lord's lifetime, she was seen at this same window on a moonlight night—the moon often shines full on these west tower windows; the lady knows they face the east—her light hair hanging over her neck, and wringing her hands, as it is said she did wring them before she leaped out. Some say she appears still; my old Aunt Naomi for one."

"How is it you are so well acquainted with these histories?" questioned Mrs. Pomeroy.

"Why, madam, I have known them all my life—at least, since I grew old enough to be trusted. We Rexes know as much of the abbey's secrets and sayings as there is to know."

Perhaps Bridget was a little mistaken there. Mrs. Pomeroy accepted it for truth. She was becoming greatly interested in the story of the poor young nun.

"The prediction is here," resumed Bridget, pointing to the picture. "But you can hardly see it, I think, madam: not sufficiently to read it. This room's dark in the after part of the day when the sun goes behind the tower. It must be set now."

"The prediction?" repeated Mrs. Pomeroy.

"It is the strangest part of the history," continued Bridget. "On the morrow following the accident, when she was lying dead, poor lady, in this very room, for they carried her up here, the lord saw some lines on the picture, close to the hand which she is holding up.



It was never known who had written them; some people thought she had before she took the leap; but the lord knew that the characters were not hers, and they came to be regarded as having been done by supernatural agency. In the earlier part of a bright day they can be read without a light. At the time, people supposed they applied to what the lord had done, but it is believed that they are to affect a later Pomeroy."

"And what are they?"

"They betoken woe to the house," answered Bridget. "It is to be hoped they'll not be realized for many a generation."

Mrs. Pomeroy had put her face and eyes close to the picture, endeavouring to decipher the lines. But she could only discern that some lines were there.

"The late lord—the one who had done the wrong was his grandfather—put little faith in all this, and I have heard him laugh over it," re-commenced Bridget; whose tongue, once set going on these topics, would never have stopped of its own accord. "He did not keep the wing always shut up; any of the family could come in who liked, and we had to dust and clean here once or twice a year. He was a rare one for disliking dust and dirt. But when——"

"Stay a moment, Bridget. In saying the late lord, do you mean him who died last?"

"Surely yes, madam. But, as I was going to add, the present lord had the whole wing shut up as soon as he came into power. The Pomeroy's are a proud race, the present lord is proud especially, and they deem the picture a memento of disgrace; a blot on the scutcheon of their ancestors."



"But," remarked Mrs. Pomeroy, "why not destroy the picture, and have done with it?—and have the rooms thrown open and embellished. I shall suggest it to the lord."

Bridget shook her head. "Madam, not a Pomeroy dare destroy that picture. An impression has passed down from father to son, since the time of the sinning lord—that whoever does away with the picture must look out for the cost, for that the fulfilment of the prediction will then be at hand. Whether my lord puts faith in it, madam, I can't say; likely not, for he is one of the boldest of a bold race: all the same, he takes care to keep the picture hidden so that no harm can approach it."

"I wish I could see the prediction," cried curious Mrs. Pomeroy, not feeling altogether pleased that Guy should have kept her in the dark as to these matters, have withheld this delightfully marvellous story from her. "Suppose you fetch a candle, Bridget?"

"Will the lady like to remain here alone?" hesitated the servant, halting at the threshold.

The Lady of Pomeroy settled that, by motioning the woman to hold back the hangings, and stepping down into the next room. There she took up her station at the open window, and leaned from it, that the outer air and the quadrangle below might hold her company.

In going down the stairs of the north tower Bridget met Jerome. "Where do you spring from?" he exclaimed in astonishment.

"The Lady of Pomeroy called me, and I have been into the west tower with her. She——"



"Don't thee tell lies, girl," interrupted the old man, not believing a word.

"You are polite to-night," returned Bridget: "I have been into the west tower with my lady; into the haunted room. And now I am going to fetch a light that she may see the lines on the nun's picture."

As Jerome slowly took in the sense of the words, his mouth dropped, his hands were lifted. "In there!" he muttered to himself in consternation. "And the lord said it was never to be opened to her—that she was too young to be frightened with such tales. She found the key, then, after all my excuses! What possessed the other key, I wonder, that I could not get it away from the lock?"

"Why, Jerome," exclaimed the Lady of Pomeroy, when he appeared, "the key you wanted was on the bunch."

"As I find, madam. Pity I did not look more particularly."

Bridget came back with a light, and they all went into the room. Mrs. Pomeroy took the candle from her hand, and held it close to the lines on the picture. Bridget looked on composedly, and Jerome in abstraction, while she slowly read them.

"When Pomeroy's heir goes forth a wife to win,  
And Pomeroy's heir goes forth in vain;  
When Pomeroy's lord by a lie doth gain,  
Then woe to the Pomeroyes, twain and twain!"

Barely had Mrs. Pomeroy read this when a shriek from Bridget caused her to start back. She had inadvertently held the waxlight too near, for the writing was faint, and had set fire to the picture.



Bridget's screams went on; scream upon scream; what with the blaze near to her and what with the superstitious fancies connected with the picture, the ill anticipated upon its destruction, she really could not contain herself. Of a calm, equable nature, she had never in her life been so startled as now; it may be said so uncontrollably terrified. Combined with the superstitious dread came fears of the abbey's destruction by fire: and while Jerome was quietly putting the flames out, and scorching his poor hands in doing it, Bridget rushed into the next room, flew to the open casement, put forth her head, and shrieked anew, "Fire! fire!"

She was heard by one of the men, who happened to be in the cloisters below. He, looking the very image of incredulous surprise, for he knew nothing of this expedition of Mrs. Pomeroy's, alarmed his fellows, and a host of them started to run up. Jerome had put out the flames then, and was locking up the haunted room with the remains of the picture within it. Mrs. Pomeroy had come forth and was standing by the shaking and trembling Bridget.

"How stupid you are, Bridget!" she fractionally said: for when vexed with ourselves, it is satisfactory to find a scape-goat to pitch upon: and the accident had vexed Mrs. Pomeroy very considerably. "It was startling for the minute of course, but there's no cause for you to shiver and shake like that."

"Madam—I—I beg your pardon. I felt just as if I should die."

The men came running through the west wing. Jerome, trembling nearly as much as Bridget, told them



all was safe now, and borrowed a couple of handkerchiefs to wrap round his hands.

Making way for the Lady of Pomeroy, and bowing as she passed onwards between them, the descent was made in dismayed silence. Only Bridget, who could not possibly lose much time in finding her tongue, lagged behind to exchange whispers with Jerome.

"She'll die in her confinement, Jerome."

"What d'ye say?" returned Jerome, really not understanding.

"I'm afraid she will; our poor lady! She has caused the calamity, you see."

"I wish my old hands had been burnt right off first, rather than they should have brought out the keys at all," was Jerome's bitter answer. "But don't you go and set that stupid notion agate. You are old enough to know better. Just you let the lord hear you say such a thing!"

"I've said no harm: and I'm sure if prayers will ensure her safety, she will have mine. But it's an awful thing to happen! I thought she was holding the light very close. And now you come into Aunt Rex's parlour, Jerome, and let us see to your hands."

Barely had Mrs. Pomeroy gained her own rooms again, when Guy entered. Anxious about his wife, not caring to leave her longer than he could help, he made a point of returning early. In her heart of hearts, she was somewhat afraid of her at times stern husband, and her courage failed her as she prepared to tell her tale. Would he be frightfully angry with her?

"Guy," she whispered, nestling to him as he took his seat by her on the sofa, "something very unfor-



tunate has happened, and I want to tell you of it. I have had an accident and done some mischief."

The thought, passing through Guy's mind at this, was that she must have broken some one or other of the costly ornaments he had bought to adorn her sitting-room. Drawing her closer to him, a smile parted his lips as he looked down at her. All he could see was the parting of her bright brown hair, for her face was hidden.

"Dreadful mischief, no doubt," he answered fondly.

"I want you to forgive me for it; not to be too angry with me."

"I will not be angry with you at all: and I forgive you beforehand. What is it?"

In a voice that he could scarcely hear, and with her face still hidden, she told her tale, holding one of his hands all the while between hers, as if playing with it. How that, sitting alone in the oak room, she had fallen on the wish to see the west wing opposite, and had gone to it with Jerome; and how that later, wanting to see the picture better and the lines on it, she had told Bridget to bring a candle; and—and"—there she broke into tears.

"And what?" asked Guy in a low, strange tone, that did not sound like his own.

"Burnt it," she sobbed. "The flames of the candle caught the picture as I held it, and it blazed up, and burnt."

Not a word spoke Guy. Not a symptom of anger did he betray; nothing could be gathered from his impassive silence. Alice waited; but there came no sound, and she lifted her head. His thoughts seemed to be gone a wool-gathering; his eyes had a far-away look in them.



"Won't you say you forgive me, Guy? I am so sorry; so vexed."

"Yes, yes," he answered hastily; "I said I forgave you beforehand. It does not matter: it cannot be helped. There, there, love; don't cry. But you should not have gone up there without me."

"And what do you think the prediction meant, Guy?—something about the Heir of Pomeroy failing to get a bride, and the lord winning one by a lie?"

"I think nothing," replied Guy in a sharper tone. "But don't go climbing about the abbey again, my dear; you are not in a fit state for it. As to the picture, it was a memento of a deed which, if tradition may be trusted, was a disgrace to the name of Pomeroy."

## CHAPTER X.

### The Quarrel.

THE round grey stone building, not large, but very old, called the Keep, stood near to the back of the Abbey of Pomeroy, its walls overgrown with moss. A gentle slope of green grass descended from it, then came a level dell, and then, on another gentle slope rose the rear, or west pile of the abbey. This rear had neither entrance nor window; no look-out of any kind: you must travel round to the front before you could get in.

Sitting near the keep on the dry and warm grass one hot day in the beginning of October, was the lovely Lady of Pomeroy. She had thrown herself there in listlessness: for the old listlessnesses at times clung to her yet. Pacing the dell before her, was the nurse



bearing the infant, now some ten weeks old. The anticipated heir, so anxiously expected and for whom great rejoicings had been planned, had turned out to be a pretty little girl. The Lord of Pomeroy did not appear to care for the disappointment. He loved the child just as much as he would have loved the heir; ay, and was as proud of it. The rejoicings were to be held all the same: they had been delayed until his wife should be thoroughly restored to strength. Then the invitations went out, and on the morrow the abbey would be filled with guests. Guy had taken advantage of his last day of leisure to ride to Owlstone: and his wife sat, as you see, on the grass, before the old and uninhabited keep.

"Bridget, is the baby sleeping?"

"Just going off, madam."

"Then take her indoors."

Bridget moved towards the abbey with her charge. She had been promoted to the office of nurse to the child, simply because Mrs. Pomeroy had become fascinated with her tales and her legends of the dead-and-gone Pomeroyes, belonging to the ages as dead-and-gone as they were. Bridget would recount to her mistress marvellous legends of the Pomeroyes' grandeur and chivalry, varied with whispers of the Pomeroyes' less laudatory exploits. Mrs. Pomeroy took quite a liking for the woman, and she assigned to her the place of nurse to the child; herself being its nurse in one sense of the word.

Mrs. Pomeroy sat on, her parasol held over her right arm; that is, between her face and the sun. It was pleasant to recline there at her ease, enjoying the balm of the warm and tranquil air. A great bleak



place the abbey looked, something like a prison; this west pile before her having neither window nor outlet, nothing but its massive, unbroken, lichen-covered walls.

"Thank goodness this solitude will be over to-morrow!" ejaculated Mrs. Pomeroy. "I can wear my new dresses, and there will be people to see them. I'm sure I was quite well enough for company a month ago, only Guy is so stupidly careful of me. How delightful it will be!"

Lost in this charming prospect—and to Mrs. Pomeroy, vain and frivolous, gaiety was always charming—she fell into a train of thought; from which she was aroused by the sound of footsteps behind her, hastening down the slope of the keep. She turned her head, and—what was it that dazzled her eyes, as if the glaring sun had suddenly flashed upon them?—what was it that dazzled her mind to bewilderment? She rose up, little conscious what she did; her cheek flushed and paled, paled and flushed, her hands trembled, her heart grew sick and dizzy. Whose form was it, that caused all this emotion?

It was that of a noble-looking man, of the remarkable height, the well-turned limbs, the fine make of her own husband; indeed just for a moment she thought it was Guy, and wondered what brought him there. But no, it was not Guy: it was Rupert. Though much alike, Guy's countenance could not boast the remarkable beauty of this one, for Guy had his hare-lip, his stern look, and his unnaturally pale complexion. Yes, it was Rupert, Rupert whom she had not heard of, or seen, for two years.

Rupert Pomeroy drew a step back as she rose and turned her face to him: he had not observed her. She



looked at him, not speaking, but she could not conceal the agitation which had taken possession of her whole frame: and he halted and stood before her. Alas! though she had resolutely thrust Rupert Pomeroy from her mind, and so believed she had thrust him from her heart, this sudden meeting served to show that the love had been only smouldering. She covered her emotion with a look of scorn, for that was the chief feeling kept uppermost since she believed that he had wilfully played her false. Not less scornful, however, was the tone of Rupert.

"It is a surprise to me to meet the Lady of Pomeroy."

Again they stood gazing at each other, neither speaking. Mrs. Pomeroy remembered her position as the wife of his brother, and she struggled to maintain it as she ought.

"I believe I speak to Rupert Pomeroy," she coldly said.

"Am I so changed that you need doubt it," was his retort. "I should have thought, by the circumstances attending our last meeting, that you would only too well have remembered me. Have you forgotten that last meeting?"

She was thunderstruck at his audacity. "Do you know who I am?"

"To my cost I do know it. Guy's wife. But in that last meeting you swore to be mine. Alice," he continued, his voice trembling, "I trusted you from my very soul."

She could not comprehend. She advanced a step nearer to him.

"Are you aiming to play off some deceit upon me



again now, as you did then? To what end? You and I have nothing in common."

"Nothing?"

"Save hatred; contempt. They are what I feel for you."

He looked on her steadily, mockery in his eye and on his lip. She was excessively agitated; she could not understand his looks, his words. Instead of sinking to the earth with shame for his treachery, he appeared to throw blame and scorn on her.

"You are my husband's brother," she resumed, "and I will say to you what I would not stoop to say were I any other man's wife. Though, it maybe that you are utterly callous, impervious to reproach. You came in secret to my mother's home to win my love——"

"And I thought I did win it."

"How dared you so come to befool me," she continued in agitation, waving away his interruption, "dastardly pretending that your love was mine?"

"Dastardly!" retorted Rupert, his eye flashing; "I am a Pomeroy. Was it more dastardly in one brother to seek you, than in the other? What though Guy was the heir?—had you wanted position and riches, why did you not say so?"

"I did not want them. You know I did not."

"You married them, at any rate, madam," he slightly returned. "And you made pretty good haste to do so."

"This show of recrimination will not serve your purpose," resumed Mrs. Pomeroy. "I would like an answer before I have done with the subject for ever. Once more I ask for an explanation, and if you pos-



sess a grain of honour you will give it—why you came, deceiving me with your false vows?”

“If you had aught about you as true as they were, you would do, Lady of Pomeroy. Whatever ill I may have done, I loved you faithfully: as I have never loved and never shall love another.”

“You may spare yourself the avowal, Rupert Pomeroy: to what end, I ask, lie about it now? I know who it was you did love; whom you were loving and visiting, while you pretended to love me. But I am ashamed of myself for thus alluding to anything so disgraceful.”

“As you have alluded to it, you had better explain, madam. I do not know what you are speaking of.”

“You do.”

“On my word of honour I do not.”

In Rupert's generally gay eyes there sat so earnest an expression that Mrs. Pomeroy felt staggered. Did he in truth not understand? She dropped her voice.

“Have you forgotten that unhappy person who—who——”

“Pray proceed.”

“Whom you took away with you?”

Rupert looked at her. “What person?”

“I know all about it. I blush for myself that I should deign to allude to it again—but I wish you to understand that, though you succeeded in deceiving me for a space of time, the enlightenment came. Therefore we stand on equal ground for the future.”

“I ask what person,” he steadily repeated. “What do you mean?”

“Gaunt's daughter,” replied Mrs. Pomeroy, in a whisper.



After a stare of surprise, Rupert burst out laughing. Mrs. Pomeroy turned indignantly away.

He strode after her, and caught her by the arm. "Do you mean what you say, Mrs. Pomeroy? Is it possible that you suspect *me* of having abducted Sybilla Gaunt?"

"I do not suspect. I know it was you."

Her contemptuous manner had been telling upon him. "Then, hear me," he said, almost as passionately as his brother Guy could have spoken. "I never had an ill thought towards Sybilla, I never had a grain of love for her; I swear it. You are entirely mistaken."

There was truth in his eye and in his tone. Mrs. Pomeroy turned pale. "Surely you knew that she fell into trouble?"

"I knew that. I suppose you ladies call it trouble."

Mrs. Pomeroy frowned. But she was in a very tumult of agitation, comprehending nothing, as it seemed, and could but pursue her questions.

"Did you know who was the author of it?"

"I did."

"Tell me, and I will believe all you say."

Rupert hesitated. "As to believing me, you must do as you please. If I ever spoke a word of truth in my life, I am speaking it now."

"Yes, yes, I do believe you. But you should not leave it in this uncertainty; you *must* tell me. Who was it?"

Still Rupert hesitated. "There exists a reason why it should not be known at Abbeyland," he said. "If I do tell you will you undertake to keep it secret?"

"I will,"



"It was my brother George. Captain Pomeroy."

"Captain Pomeroy," she repeated below her breath. "Did he ——"

"Ask me no questions," interrupted Rupert. "I can tell you nothing but the bare fact that George was the—the culprit. Who was it that put you on the wrong scent?"

"Guy."

"Guy! Then I shall have a score to settle with him."

"He believed it was you. The village believed it."

"Guy did not believe it—whatever the village may have done. The village laid many a peccadillo on my back, being a broad one, that had no legal right there. What did I care?—it made me none the sadder."

"Guy did not?" dreamily repeated Mrs. Pomeroy.

"Guy knew better. He knew as much as I did."

"Joan thought it," she continued. "My mother thought it."

"Very likely. I have a broad back, I say, and always have had one. Was this the reason that you broke your vows to me?"

"Yes," she answered, her pale lips quivering. "Guy came to me again one day, pressing me to be his wife: to get rid of his importunity, I confided to him that I loved you, that I had promised to wait and be yours; and then he ridiculed my credulity, and told me you were the cause of all that had happened to Sybilla Gaunt. He said that Sybilla had followed you."

Rupert turned from her to give a few strong words to his brother. "And then you married him?"

"And then I married him, I was mad, Rupert: I



did not care what became of me. He has played us both false."

"He has played us both false," echoed Rupert, "false as his own false nature. And yet I never knew it was false until now; for, with all his sternness, I took Guy to be the soul of honour. Let him look to himself!"

"But, Rupert, you never came, you never wrote," she pleaded, the tears running down her cheeks. "Why did you stay away in London all that while? What was I to think?"

Rupert coughed: conscience told him that he could clear himself less easily on this score than the other. But the best of us have excuses at hand.

"I stayed there hunting after that government post which I expected. And, later, I got put into the Queen's Bench Prison: that must have been not long before your marriage. Do you know who put me there? Guy."

"Guy!"

"He did. In so far as that he would not advance a poor, small, pitiful sum, just a few hundreds, to keep me out of it. He wrote word to our lawyer that a little spell at the Queen's Bench would do me good."

"Oh, Rupert! It has been a black plot of treachery against us both."

"It has; and it succeeded. He won you by a lie! Let him look to himself."

Rupert spoke in a pointed manner. Mrs. Pomeroy had little doubt what it was he alluded to, and she shuddered as with a sudden fear. That wild prediction, bearing dread portent for the Lords of Pomeroy, and implicitly believed in—when one of them should win a wife by means of a lie—recurred to her.



Rupert Pomeroy touched with his forefinger Mrs. Pomeroy's shoulder. "You love me still," he dared to say. "Nay, no denial. I see it."

"From my whole heart," she answered, for indignation was strong within her; and she had begun to hate her treacherous husband with a deadly hatred.

Oh, foolish woman! Ill-trained, ill-regulated, devoid of conscience, though she surely must be, how could she make so dangerous and wicked an avowal? The next moment she repented of it herself, the little grace within her was making itself heard, and some shame sat in her face as she said a hasty farewell to Rupert.

"Won by a lie," she muttered to herself, "won by a lie!"

Rupert told the truth. George Pomeroy was the culprit, not himself, and he had been in George's confidence throughout: had done his best to aid in keeping the affair a secret from John Gaunt.

This same morning, two or three hours before, as Gaunt sat at his early breakfast, Rupert Pomeroy had walked in. "Will you give me house-room, Gaunt, for a few days?" he asked, after greetings had passed.

"With pleasure; you know that, Mr. Rupert," was the warm answer of the unsuspecting keeper, with whom Rupert was a favourite. "But what has the abbey done to you?"

"The abbey! do you think I would trouble that?" returned Rupert. "Not after Guy's unbrotherly conduct to me."

"What has he done?"

"He has let me languish in prison for I don't know how long, when three or four hundreds at first would have saved me from it. Yes, Guy might have saved



me when I was first arrested, and I'd have taken pretty good care they did not catch me again. Once put in there, and the fact known, all the liabilities I possessed came down upon me together. It was rather a jolly time, though, in there, taking one thing with another."

"And how is it that you have managed to escape now?"

"Whitewashed," briefly rejoined Rupert: and Gaunt drew in his lips with an expression of pain. "Yes, of course it is very degrading for a Pomeroy," Rupert added, noting the look; "but no one came to my aid, and I could not languish there for life. Guy will about die of it, I expect. Rare fun if he does."

Gaunt took the valise from Rupert's hand, and conducted him to the little square guest-chamber that was so rarely occupied.

The Lord of Pomeroy's business that day at Owlstone was to take the chair at a county meeting, involving some question connected with religion. Guy, energetic upon the point, warm and earnest in supporting his own faith, stayed to discuss the matter with some friends after the prolonged meeting was over, and got home late. Alice was at dinner; she had not chosen to wait. Guy ran up to his dressing-room for a minute, and then sat down to table.

At dinner he told her about the meeting: what was said at it, what done. But that he was so completely absorbed in the topic himself, he might have noted that his wife listened with callous indifference, scarcely deigning to make any reply.

In point of fact, Mrs. Pomeroy was boiling over with wrath, burning to "have it out" with Guy. She



fully meant never to forgive her husband what he had done; never: she waited to tell him of the meeting with Rupert, and all she had learnt at it. But the servants were present, and she had to condemn herself to silence.

As the attendants quitted the room, leaving the dessert and wine on the table, Guy drew forth a packet of letters—three or four, tied together—from his pocket. Owlstone had two posts a day; Abbeyland but one; therefore, when any of the abbey people were at Owlstone in the afternoon, they called at the post-office to see if any letters lay there. As Guy had done to-day; and found these.

He proceeded to open them. For Alice this was another delay; he was always so absorbed in his letters, and she wanted his undivided attention. But the waiting was trying her; the tension of her nerves became well-nigh unbearable. Her breath was beginning to grow short; her throat to beat: she laid her hand upon her neck to still it.

“Great heavens!”

The exclamation came from Guy: and it startled her. Startled her because he, the usually calm man, was so powerfully agitated. A dark flash of anger sat on his face, his eyes glared, he groaned in pain. The letter in his hand was in Mr. Hildyard’s writing, their London solicitor; Alice could see that much. Surely it had brought some terrible news!

“He must have been mad!” groaned Guy. “The degenerate hound!—to have wrought this shameful disgrace upon our name!”

“Mr. Hildyard has?” questioned Alice, surprised



into asking the question, her own grievances giving momentary place to her curiosity.

"Not Hildyard. That wicked brother of mine—Rupert."

The truth was, Mr. Hildyard, deeming himself compelled to acquaint the head of the family with the crisis that had taken place in the fortunes (or misfortunes) of one of its members, had tardily sat down the previous evening to accomplish it. And the letter on which Guy's eyes were strained conveyed the same tidings which Rupert had himself so unceremoniously spoken in a single word to Gaunt—that he had been "whitewashed." Perhaps hardly any other word or deed could have struck so humiliating a sound upon the haughty Lord of Pomeroy.

"He is worse than a serpent!" he raved: and Alice felt daunted as she saw his threatening face, "He is worse than——"

"Mr. Rupert Pomeroy."

It was Jerome who threw wide the door and announced him. Rupert came forward. Guy gazed at him as though he were an apparition.

"I had thought you would be alone," spoke Rupert lightly, addressing Guy. "You must have dined late."

The easy manner, the insolent words—insolent in Guy's ear—only added fuel to fire. Dark reproach sat on his face, bitter scorn on his tongue. Rupert recriminated on his own score: and Mrs. Pomeroy, who stood her ground, and at first was too terrified to do more than stand it in a remote corner, at length joined in.

What passed, none, apart from themselves, ever



knew, but the storm terrified those of the servants who heard it. Jerome, nearly out of his senses, stayed in the ante-room: perhaps to keep others away. They gathered in the corridors and on the stairs. It ended by the Lord of Pomeroy's dashing open the door and ordering the servants to thrust his brother forth. They would have done it; they dared not disobey the lord when he had that temper upon him, or indeed at any other time; but Rupert walked forth of his own accord. Exaggerated tales of the interview went forth to the village.

Mrs. Pomeroy passed swiftly out of the dining-room in the wake of Rupert, and went to her child in the nursery. It was wailing a low wail of complaint or of pain. Mrs. Pomeroy took it, but it would not be soothed; there was still the same low wail; not a cry.

"I cannot think what's the matter with her," exclaimed Bridget. "She has never cried like this: when she does cry, it is like all other children, loud enough for half the abbey to hear, but not this strange pining wail."

No; Mrs. Pomeroy might try her best: the infant would not be tranquillised. Was it wailing for the distress that was coming on its home?

Tired at length with her efforts to soothe it, for a little thing soon tired Mrs. Pomeroy, she gave the child back to Bridget, went to her room, and rang for her maid. Theresa appeared almost in a state of collapse: she feared that her lady must have had something to do with the cause of the alarming quarrel.

"Which bed-chambers have been prepared for the guests to-morrow?"

"All that were available, I think, madam," answered



Theresa. "All on this floor, I am sure; and some of those above stairs."

"Is the small room at the side of the north corridor, next to the blue-room, ready?"

"Yes, madam, I know it is, for I helped to take the linen to the different rooms, and that was one."

"Carry my things there."

She had gradually (impressed, no doubt, with her own exalted dignity as Lady of Pomeroy), been getting into a habit of speaking imperiously to her servants, even to Theresa, therefore this curtness was no new thing. But the woman doubted in what sense to take the words.

"Remove all my things to that room, I say," repeated Mrs. Pomeroy, "Now. Call some one to help you. It will be mine from henceforth, instead of this."

Theresa was surprised. "And the lord's things also?" she asked.

"Mine, I said," was the sharp retort of Mrs. Pomeroy. She went outside, passed into one of the transverse corridors, and stood at its end window, apparently gazing into the courtyard. In reality she was gazing within her, at her own outraged heart. Rupert's offence in "whitewashing" himself might be very humiliating, but what was that to her?—all her compassion was spent upon herself—all her bitter rage was given to Guy for the false trick he had played her. Her hands were clasped until the nails pressed her sharply: but what cared she then for bodily pain.

A short while, and she turned to make her way to the dining-room, where she had left her husband. He was not there. She found him in the saloon where they generally sat after dinner; that gorgeously-fitted



up room which Guy had made all gilding and beauty for her: a contrast to their own dark spirits just now. The mirrors reflected their countenances, and Mrs. Pomeroy's was a scowling one; but she had made a compact with herself to be cool and contemptuous, rather than fierce. They had had enough of fierceness for one evening.

Guy sat in one of her dainty chairs, calm, save that his eye was restless. His wife went up and stood in front of him: she placed her hands before her, one over the other, as a school-girl does when repeating a lesson to her governess, and began in a measured tone, steadily looking at him.

"Why did you bring this misery upon us?"

His grey eye flashed. "I have brought no misery. You will bring it upon yourself, if you behave as you behaved to-night."

"You have brought a misery upon us that will never end but with our lives. It never shall end."

"Speak for yourself," he rejoined.

"I do; but I also speak for you, Lord of Pomeroy. You shall go your way, and I will go mine: we are strangers from this hour."

"Perhaps you would like to go your way with Rupert," retorted the lord: thinking, though, in the plenitude of his security that such a catastrophe could no more take place than that the stars could shine at noonday. She and Rupert had both provoked him that evening unjustifiably by their incautious reproaches to him.

"No," she replied, catching up her breath with a gasp, and her face turning to crimson, "you have barred that for ever."



His lips parted, she thought to laugh, and closed again. She was mistaken there; nothing could be much further from Guy Pomeroy's heart and lips that night than laughter. Alice resumed.

"Why did you do so? Why did you come to me with that wicked tale—knowing it was false?"

"I had two motives," he coolly replied: "and all tales are fair, you know, in love and war. I loved you; I was dying for you: and—I would save you from him. Allow that he was not guilty in that one particular case, other cases could have been told against him. Had you been suffered to marry him, he would have toyed with your heart for a month, and then broken it."

"*I* was dying for Rupert," she returned, in a low tone, while the large tear-drops of regret filled her eyes. "Far rather would I have been his wife for a month, though my heart had then broken, than yours for eternity."

Guy suppressed his just indignation. No one, save himself, knew what it cost him to do it, or how bitterly she was trying him. "You shall not repeat such language to me, Alice; it is shameful of you to utter it."

"You have heard it before," was the agitated reply. "I told you, in the very hour that you came forth to win me with your falsehood, that I loved your brother with an all-enduring love: I told you I should never love you. You have not forgotten."

No, that he had not. Often enough he had winced at the remembrance of the words.

"On the day before our wedding a thought occurred—it must have been some good spirit sent it to me—what if you were deceiving me: and I put the ques-



tion deliberately to you," she continued. "Do you remember your answer? I prayed you to tell me true; I said that should it ever come to light, later, that you were so deceiving me, it would be bad for both of us. It has now come."

Guy rose from his chair. "Let us have done with this, Alice," he said, in a tone of conciliation.

"Done with it?" she repeated. "Yes, presently, when I have finished: but its effects will never be done with. Guy Pomeroy, I will no longer be your wife: never again; never, never!"

He smiled. "Yes, you will."

"Never again," she murmured. "I would not do so wickedly: for my whole love is Rupert's. I thought that love was conquered; I did, indeed; but the sight of him has shown me my mistake. The fact is, since I became your wife I have striven to keep it under, to suppress his image in my mind; I would not suffer it to rise, I would not dwell upon it. Henceforward I shall cherish it and live upon it; so you see how impossible it is that I can stay here to be your wife."

Guy's lips were turning livid. "Have you any sense of shame left?" he asked. And truly she could possess little, thus boldly to beard her husband.

"You may get a separation; a divorce; anything you please," she continued, trembling with passion. "The sooner the better. And then you may bring home another to be the Lady of Pomeroy."

He caught her by the arm.

"You cannot beat me," she said. "The chivalrous Lords of Pomeroy do not beat women."

"You will tempt me to it, Alice, if you drive me to desperation," returned Guy; who, considering his



fiery nature, was keeping his temper marvellously well. "Hold your peace."

"When I have said what I wish to say. At present, until these people who are expected shall have come and gone, there must be an appearance of amity between us: after that, I shall consider what to do: probably go home to my mother. But while these gossiping crowds are here, let us play a part: all suavity when before them; strangers when not."

"You pretty little schemer!" he laughed, a shade of contempt in his tone. "The Lords of Pomeroy don't part with their wives thus easily; although you seem so willing to resign your baby."

She looked up with a startled glance. "I should take my baby with me."

"Oh dear no," replied the Lord of Pomeroy. "If you leave my home upon a whim, you do not take my child."

"The law would give it me."

"Alice, it would *not*." And Guy was right.

"Do you know," she whispered, struggling to maintain her assumed calmness, "that you are tempting me to hate you with a double hatred. You have brought woe upon me for ever. I disliked you, Guy, before we married. I hate you now."

"You are bold, my lady."

"But for my own good name, and that the child may grow up to call me mother, I would have quitted your roof this night; ay, though the step had flung me into the arms of Rupert. There was a demon tempting me—had it been only to take my revenge on you."

"If you do not cease, I will have you confined as a madwoman," cried Guy. "Surely you must be mad, to inflict upon yourself this humiliation!"



"I have nearly said my say. To-morrow, before my guests, you will find me all smiles and polite speeches again. My things are being removed to the small room in the north wing, and that will be mine as long as I remain at the abbey."

He leaned towards her, hissing rather than speaking: the haughty Pomeroy temper was being stung cruelly by these insults. "If you attempt to leave your own apartments, I will bar you up in them—and come and attend you as your keeper. You *are* mad, Alice."

"You won me by a lie," she returned, greatly agitated; "and, now that I know it, I am not bound to obey you. If a thief should steal a shilling, though he may get it into his possession, it is not legally or morally his. Did you forget the prediction?—the woe it threatens?"

Guy retorted with scorn. "Prediction? Threatened woe? Tush!—unless you choose to mar the peace of the house and bring it."

"There was to be great woe when that picture was destroyed," she said, catching up her breath.

"Always remember one thing, Alice—that you visited the west wing and the picture in direct disobedience to me. But for that, the picture would not have been destroyed. I must try to teach my wife better behaviour. But I wish to do it in all kindness. You will order your things back to your own room."

"I will not," she steadily answered. "If you attempt to force me to it, I will go this night to my mother. Pretty scandal for the Lord of Pomeroy, when the guests shall arrive to-morrow and find his lady flown!"

Alice called him right; the Lord of Pomeroy: he



was both lord and master. She went to the room that had been hers; Guy followed and closed the door. Bridget, who was near, was startled by the sounds that came from the room: recriminating words from both, though she could not hear their purport; very decisive and haughty ones from the lord, sobs and wails from her mistress. Sudden silence supervened. Bridget felt terrified, she hardly knew of what, went to the door with an excuse, and knocked at it.

It was opened instantly by the lord: he appeared to have been standing near it, and her mistress sat by the table. Bridget could not see her face distinctly, for the room was only lighted by the large lamp, which hung outside in the court-yard.

"Did you call me, madam?" she hastened to say. "I thought you might want the baby, but she's asleep now."

"No one called," replied the lord. "Bridget."

"Sir."

"Some orders of your mistress's have been misapprehended—her things have been carried to the north corridor. Speak to Theresa and have them brought back."

The things were carried back. Mrs. Pomeroy did not gainsay it; and the servants whispered. Oppose the iron will of Guy Pomeroy? his wife need not have thought it.

When rest and silence fell upon the abbey, there appeared to be rest and silence in the lady's chamber; but, had any been curious enough to listen, they might have heard the monotonous step of the lord, pacing it through the better part of the night.

It is an act of madness to pour spirits on a raging



fire; little less so to control by angry force the fierce will of an indignant woman. That Mrs. Pomeroy had not a well-regulated mind has been previously pointed out, lest the reader did not see it for himself: though perhaps none, even of those who had been about her from childhood, suspected *how* ill-regulated it might become in a season of temptation. The steps taken by Guy—in this the first moment of her renewed fancy for Rupert and rage against himself—were not judicious ones. Far better that he had let her go to the lonely room, and suffered her indignation to spend itself there for a short while, a few days, and then have tried conciliation. It might have answered—after a little holding out; for a woman, look you, talk as she may, will think twice before she goes the length of actually quitting her husband's home, or of in any way separating herself from him. As it was, Madam Alice Pomeroy was nursing all kinds of reprisals in her revengeful heart.

## CHAPTER XI.

### Folly.

IN the state dining-room below, never used but on occasions of extremely ceremonious or large dinners, sat the Lord and Lady of Pomeroy, entertaining their guests. A fine sight: a goodly company. The handsome dishes of silver-gilt, bearing their costly viands, crowded the board. Dinner à-la-Russe mode had not come in then; and the more prodigal the feast displayed on the table, the greater honour was accounted to be rendered to the guests.



The wax-lighted chandeliers hung from the ceiling; the side-board shone with its array of glass and plate. Numerous servants in their beautiful liveries of purple velvet and silver waited about, headed by Jerome in plain attire, who stood behind his lord, and never served anybody but him. At the left hand of Mrs. Pomeroy sat Father Andrew, towards the middle of the table sat Mrs. Wylde. The priest was all merry good nature; it did one good to look at his rubicund face, he could hardly control it to solemnity while he said grace; Mrs. Wylde was gorgeous as dress could make her, but otherwise not much to be noticed: and as these two are all we know among the guests, the others need not be mentioned.

It was a grand old room; and was supposed to have been the chapel in by-gone days, before the other chapel was built. The oak panelings were in small divisions and richly carved, each one having been formerly a monk's stall. Three high windows of painted glass, representing scenes in the time of the Crusaders, looked towards the quadrangle. They gave the only light the room had, consequently it was dark by day: but emblazoned, as now, with its many wax lights, that fault could not at present be charged upon it. On these state occasions the painted windows were lighted up by means of lamps placed behind them outside; and they formed not the least of the room's attractions, particularly for those who had the luck to sit on the side opposite, and so could look at them at will during the whole time of the banquet.

Who so gay as Mrs. Pomeroy, heading her table there in her white robes of silk and lace, her favourite attire; who so calm, so equable, so courteous as her



lord, facing her at the end of the long table? Of all the toilettes present, not one was more beautiful than hers; of all the faces, not one was so lovely. Upon her white neck, her arms, nestling amid her hair, glittered the diamonds handed to her by Guy on their wedding day; upon her cheeks shone the damask flush of pleasurable excitement. This set of diamonds, and they were of rare beauty, belonged to the reigning Lady of Pomeroy, and to her alone: did she cease to reign, they went from her. If Guy died to-morrow, and Rupert succeeded, Mrs. Pomeroy could no longer wear or claim the diamonds. Had her child been a boy, why then she would have reigned Lady of Pomeroy until that boy should in his turn bring a wife home to replace her, and could have worn the Pomeroy diamonds until then.

Dear, most dear, was this show and state to Mrs. Pomeroy. Her heart was conscious of that. It was also conscious, for a little latent voice kept rising within it to that effect, that if she quitted the abbey, this show and state would, for her, be for ever over: it was only as the Lord of Pomeroy's wife that she could enjoy it. The homage rendered to her was but rendered in the right of Guy: separate herself from him, and she might sink back into the obscurity from which she came; and it was obscurity, compared with the position she revelled in now. Mrs. Wylde was rich, but her riches would not gather about her an assemblage such as this; the guests of haughty rank, second only to princes; or the plate emblazoned with the Lord of Pomeroy's arms, come down from generation to generation; or the time-worn, sumptuous-clad retainers, who looked as if they



could never belong to any but an ancient family. Yes, yes; Alice Pomeroy had been raised to this desirable height, and she would certainly think twice before she wilfully forfeited it.

Ever and anon as she sat there, came a thought into her mind, "I should not like to leave it; I must do nothing rashly." Until this evening, which was the day of the guests' arrival, and the evening following the scene with Guy, she had been keeping up the ball of indignation with her own heart; had been feeding her enmity to her husband, and been saying to herself, "I will not stay with him." But now, with all this glitter and glamour before her, she did not feel so sure about it. Not a single word had they spoken to one another since the unseemly recrimination; she in her resentment would not speak; Guy deemed it best to humour her mood and allow her a little time to come to her senses. Amidst the guests were some who had never seen her; and Guy had performed the introduction with the most perfect suavity, "My wife, the Lady of Pomeroy." For all anybody could see, they were upon the pleasant terms that man and wife should be; she was lively, laughing, gay; he, courteous and attentive to all to the last degree. Ever and anon, as they sat opposite to each other now, she caught Guy's eyes fixed upon her—and turned away her own at once in resentment. He was the finest looking man in the room, towering above them all; some little warmth sat in his usually pallid face; and, though the unfortunate upper lip was undeniably ugly, the well carved Pomeroy features, and the dark-grey eyes were beautiful.

The lord had begun by entertaining his guests



right regally, as a Pomeroy loved to do; he would so continue to entertain them until the fortnight for which they were invited came to an end. Excursions of pleasure abroad, evening feasting and festivities at home, these were occasionally varied with men's out-of-door sports. The grandest fête of all would be that of the christening: for which Miss Pomeroy, who was to be one of the god-mothers, would arrive. And so, we leave them at the dinner table.

The next morning the gentlemen went out shooting, Guy giving orders for luncheon to be sent to them. Some of the ladies proposed a drive to Owlstone, and carriages were ordered round. Towards mid-day, Alice, making her baby an excuse for absenting herself from the rest of her guests, left her mother to entertain them, put on her bonnet, and walked out. It was a most lovely day. October had brought in a true *été de St. Michael*, and this was the third of the month.

Yes, she walked out deliberately, knowing that she ran the hazard of meeting Rupert Pomeroy: though indeed he might already have left Abbeyland. In later years, when she was bearing the burden of a life-long repentance, she would tell herself again and again that she did not seek to meet him; that she would not have gone out purposely to do it. Most certainly she had no wrong thought in her heart; let us give her that due; she did not forget that she was his brother's wife.

Winding round to the south of the abbey, her beautiful morning dress of a delicate lilac colour trailing on the hot grass, she came upon Rupert. He was standing by the keep, just in the same spot where



they had met two days before. Rupert raised his hat and held out his hand; the colour rushed vividly into her face as she put out her own hand to answer it.

"Taking a walk, Mrs. Pomeroy? You are lucky to get time for it, with that house full of people."

"Most of them are out," she answered, "and mamma is there. Oh, Rupert! I—I must tell you: we had such a dreadful scene."

"Who had? When?"

"I and Guy. After you left."

And then, most imprudently and inexcusably, Mrs. Pomeroy began to give Rupert the history of what had passed between herself and Guy. She was yearning for sympathy, and she had no one else to tell it to; and the sight and presence of Rupert, whom she still so passionately loved—though it is a humiliation even to record it on paper—called up again all her resentment, her ill-feeling towards Guy. One word, one avowal led to another, Alice did not spare her husband; all the bitter things she could say were heaped upon him. The fact of Rupert being his brother justified this in her own mind; to any other man she, with all her incaution, would not have been so imprudent. And Rupert, far from repressing, met her half way, for had he not grievances on his own score to settle with Guy, and abused him to her heart's content. Thus, in close conversation, now one speaking, and now the other, and pacing slowly round and round the keep, they, chancing to lift their heads, saw a company of sportsmen at a great distance.

"Oh, Rupert, Guy is with them!" she suddenly exclaimed: "and they are coming this way! It will



make him more angry than ever to see me talking with you."

Without a word, Rupert touched one of her hands and drew her to a small low door in the wall at the back of the keep; it flew open, and admitted them inside.

"You are safe here until they have passed," he whispered.

"But how did you get the door open?" she asked in wonder. "I always understood that little door could not be opened from the outside."

"Neither can it be, except by me and the lord. Yes, Jerome knows the secret; I forgot him. There is an invisible spring."

"The lord!" she uttered, in breathless agitation. "Suppose he should take it in his head to enter now?"

Rupert smiled, drew a strong iron bar across the door and secured it. "Not a dozen lords combined could enter now."

"Suppose he were to come in by the front door?" fear suggested again.

"My dear Alice, what should bring him with the big key of the keep? I don't suppose it has been taken from Jerome's key-closet for years."

But Mrs. Pomeroy held her breath and trembled; conscience and fear were making a coward of her. And serve her right—she had no business to conceal herself. That was the first false step.

She took another within the next five minutes. She and Rupert stood, straining their ears to listen for the voices and footsteps of the sportsmen, but the walls were thick, for the door had admitted them to a room inside the keep, not to any court or yard without it.



"They must have passed by this time," said Rupert, at length; "I will go up and see. Would you like to look over the old keep, Alice?"

"Oh dear, no," she hastily replied. "I am only anxious to get out of it; I tremble lest any untoward miracle should bring Guy in."

Rupert laughed. Ascending the narrow stairs he made his way to the front of the building, and peeped out at one of the quaint loopholes of windows. Yes, the sportsmen had come that way. "They are right down in the dell now, half way to the abbey," he said, returning. "All is safe."

"Oh, thank goodness! Open the door for me."

"As soon as they shall be out of sight. You may finish what you were telling me here, as well as outside. There is no such hurry."

"I dare not, Rupert," she said. "See how I am shaking. I shall make haste to the abbey, before he can find that I am out. They must be coming back to lunch, although he ordered it taken to them."

"I don't see that you need be so afraid of him."

"But I am. It is his turn, just while these people and mamma are with us; she takes his part in everything—and he nearly frightened me to death that night. But my time will come."

"Has Mrs. Wylde been told, then?"

"No. But I know how she would take it, if she were. I am sure they must be out of sight now."

Rupert undid the door and they passed outside together; he closed it again after him.

"We cannot part for good like this, Alice, with your tale half told," he said. For what with her elaboration in the recital, and the interruption on both



sides to abuse Guy, the history was not at an end. "Meet me here to-morrow and finish it; I may be far away the next day."

"Oh, Rupert, I am afraid."

"If you mean afraid of me, you are more foolish than I could have thought you," he rejoined. "You were not afraid to meet me once, and I did not attempt to harm you: I should certainly not be likely to attempt to now. If you mean afraid of Guy, he cannot see you inside here. I will have the door open at this hour, and be waiting for you."

"I have no one in the world to tell my anger and grief to but you, Rupert, and if I cannot tell them to somebody they will break my heart," cried the weak woman.

"Of course they will," laughed Rupert, gaily; attaching as much importance to the silly words as they deserved.

"If I thought it would not be wrong to come!"

"Where would the wrong lie?"

"After all, Guy is your brother."

"He is, and you are his wife. I am not likely to forget it."

"Of course you would not forget it; neither do I. Then I will come, Rupert."

False step the second—and a very false one.

"Why, where have you been?" cried Mrs. Wylde, chancing to meet Alice in the corridor as she stole in. At least her soft steps, and her gown upheld to prevent the sound of its rustle, looked like stealing in. "I have been to your rooms, but Bridget had not seen you—and there's the poor baby crying."

"My head ached, mamma; I went out for a little



stroll," briefly responded Alice, making the best of her way onwards. "The baby's all right."

"Oh, and Alice, the gentlemen have come back to luncheon," Mrs. Wylde called out after her. "The birds were shy, and they got tired."

"Nice sportsmen!" muttered Alice, with a toss of the head.

Mrs. Pomeroy did not forget on the following day the appointment she had made with Rupert; be you very sure of that. Down deep in her heart there sat a latent consciousness that she might be acting unwisely; but she was cherishing the revengeful feeling towards her husband with the most inveterate obstinacy. Had all the saints in the chapel warned her not to meet Rupert, she would not have listened to them.

Leaving her visitors to occupy themselves as they best might, or be entertained by her mother, Mrs. Pomeroy went forth to the meeting, just as the little chapel clock was ringing out its twelve strokes for mid-day. Guy was away again, the sportsmen having gone to-day to a greater distance. She found Rupert waiting for her at the little door of the keep, which stood open.

"Good morning," said he. "I began to think you were not coming."

"It is only twelve o'clock."

"*Only* twelve! I have been here these twenty minutes. And you know the old Spanish proverb."

"No I don't. What is it?"

"To expect one who does not come; to lie in bed and not to sleep; to serve and not to be advanced, are three things enough to kill a man. I don't say they would kill me, but I never was famous for patience. Will you come in?"



"No; I am not going inside to-day. We can walk about while I finish the history of what Guy said and did; and then I must go back again."

"As you will," replied Rupert. And he was turning to shut the keep door, when, somewhat to his surprise, Alice whisked swiftly past him and went inside of her own accord.

"There's Father Andrew," she whispered.

Rupert looked round. The priest had come out of the chapel, and was halting at its entrance, as if uncertain whither to bend his steps this way, or round to his own house beyond the grave-yard. Rupert followed Mrs. Pomeroy, and shut the door.

"I'm sure you need not be afraid of the priest," said he. "What though he did see me walking with you? Is it treason?"

"He might tell Guy," said Mrs. Pomeroy.

"And what if he did! There's no harm. Guy would not eat you for it."

"He might—shake me. I declare, Rupert, I thought that night, more than once, that he would have shaken me."

"How you must have provoked him!" laughed Rupert.

"I did. I said everything I could to do it. He was so mad!"

Ce n'est que le premier pas qui coute, you know. Once inside the keep, Mrs. Pomeroy seemed reconciled to the situation, and made no move to go out again. In truth, she was afraid of being seen. Other eyes might be about, as well as Father Andrew's. She knew well enough that she ought not to be with Rupert while he and Guy were at variance; it was like "going



over to the enemy;" least of all, meet him clandestinely. He was her husband's brother, and, as such, on the face of things, it seemed that there could be no harm in it; but, remembering the terms on which Guy and Rupert were, and her own former love for Rupert, even the elastic conscience of Alice Pomeroy warned her that it was what she ought not to do. As to Rupert, his conscience was elastic at all times, but he had the high, honourable instincts of a Pomeroy in all that related to the Pomeroy, and most assuredly he would not have wronged a brother. Neither would he have willingly brought Guy's wife under Guy's censure, bitterly though he was feeling towards himself. It was very pleasant indeed to meet Alice, and join her in abusing Guy.

Rupert perched himself upon a high stone ledge projecting from the wall; Mrs. Pomeroy sat on the opposite side of the room on a low stool creaky with age: and there they talked away at Guy to their anger's content; but it was all highly wrong and foolish, and she, at any rate, ought to have known better.

"I told him I would quit the abbey as soon as these people went, Rupert," she observed, after bringing her narrative of the quarrel between herself and Guy to a conclusion. "And I think I shall."

"Quit the abbey?" questioned Rupert, not knowing in what sense to take the words. "How do you mean?"

"Quit it for good. Quit *him*."

"That *would* be wise!" returned Rupert, in a tone that proved he thought the contrary.

"But there's the baby, you see," debated Alice, as she leaned forward, her elbow on her knee, her chin



on her hand. "I am afraid he would keep it. He said he would. He said the law would give it him."

"I daresay it would. Do you want my opinion?"

"If you will give it," she answered with a half sob.

"That you could not take a more unwise step. It is one you would probably repent of all your life. Having adopted the abbey for your home, there's nothing for it, that I see, but to stay in it."

"I like it for some things," confessed Alice, thinking of the show and the splendour. "But I don't like Guy."

"You should have thought of that before. It's too late now."

"Will you, please, look at your watch?" cried Alice, thinking he was not very complimentary this morning.

It was half-past twelve. Rupert jumped off his perch, and Alice rose. In walking towards the door, a thought struck her.

"You have not told me where you are staying, Rupert?"

"At Gaunt's."

"At Gaunt's! Oh, then, you are friendly with him!"

"Why should we not be friendly?"

"Well—I thought about Captain Pomeroy, you know."

Just for the moment Rupert, who had his hand on the spring of the door and his face turned back towards her, did not seem to catch her meaning. "About Sybilla," she added.

"It would be hard if the sins of one brother were



to be visited on the other," answered Rupert, a smile crossing his lips. "Even if Gaunt were aware that George had injured him—which he is not."

"I have fancied that. Sybilla must have shielded her lover's name from exposure as jealously as though he were gold. Where is she now?"

"I cannot tell you."

"Do you think George——"

"I do not think anything about the matter," interrupted Rupert, in a tone that admitted of no appeal. "My own peccadilloes are enough for me to carry, without troubling myself about those of my brothers. We Pomeroyes do not interfere with one another. The best thing you can do, Alice, is to forget Sybilla Gaunt. Above all, remember—remember always—that I have confided George's name to you in strict confidence, as regards this affair. Never let it escape your lips."

"You may trust me. Will you look out and see that the coast is clear?"

The coast was clear. It was a very lonely spot, rarely frequented, and not a soul was in sight. For a few minutes they paced about underneath the keep: and, when they parted, another appointment was made for the morrow. Rupert avowed that he was not going away from Abbeyland just yet: he had formed no plans, and might as well stay a few days as not.

And so, as the days went on, Mrs. Pomeroy suffered herself to fall into the habit of meeting Rupert: and the habit, considering his reckless character and the temper she was at present indulging, was not altogether a safe one. All the old love was revived in the heart of each; and that was not altogether safe. Neither of them had any ill intention, not a thought of wrong:



had danger been mentioned to them, each would alike have scorned the suggestion.

Not every day, but as often as she could safely accomplish it, did Mrs. Pomeroy go forth to meet Rupert in the keep. There was no more cause for their seeking the shelter of the keep than for staying in the open air, only that within it they were safe from remark. No doubt it wore a bad appearance, these secret meetings in that private place; that is, it would have worn such had there been eyes to observe. The eyes, even though they were akin to those spoken of by Sam Weller, and able to penetrate through a stone building, would have seen nothing worse than Rupert perched on his stone ledge, and Alice on the low stool by the opposite wall, both talking away eagerly, the theme generally being the treachery of the lord. That was all; there was nothing worse to see or hear; but, as above remarked, it was altogether highly hazardous and objectionable.

The guests had been at Pomeroy Abbey ten days, three parts the length of term they were invited for, when the day of the christening dawned. It brought a disappointment. Much wonder, some concern, had been excited the previous evening in consequence of the non-arrival of Miss Pomeroy. This morning Guy received a letter, saying they were not to expect her. The indisposition of her sister's children—which had delayed her coming—had culminated in scarlatina. It was of a very mild kind, she wrote, and would no doubt soon be well over; but she felt that she ought not to come to the abbey and risk bringing the infection with her to Guy's little one. Guy was very sorry; he thought much of having his sister Joan present at



the service; but her decision was of course a right one.

And, with much pomp and ceremony, the little girl, adorned with her beauteous robes, was carried to the chapel, and there received the solemn rite of baptism. The names bestowed upon her were Mary Alice Joan. Mary after the lord's mother, Alice after his wife, Joan after his sister. In the evening there was a great banquet: at which none shone so brightly or looked so gay as Mrs. Pomeroy.

The love of Rupert was filling her whole heart; and the daily meetings with him, innocent though in one sense they were, had become ominously dear. I shall see him to-day, was the one thought that would flash over her mind when she woke in the morning: and in her gladness she was even civil to her husband.

And Guy? Guy was just trusting to time and to himself to make it all right with his wife; and he had no more notion that she was keeping up the ball of abuse of him, or treacherously meeting Rupert, than had the man in the moon.

But, one evening, two days after the christening, when Alice had gone to the nursery before dinner, Mrs. Wylde came in. Alice looked rather surprised as her mother carefully shut the door and came forward.

"Is any body in the inner room, Alice?"

"No. Bridget went down stairs for something or other. Why?"

"What brought you to-day marching round the keep with Rupert Pomeroy?" proceeded Mrs. Wylde, without circumlocution.



At that moment Alice's baby was lying on her lap, its pretty little face turned upwards, its eyes closed in sleep. She bent over the child, seemingly to do something to the frill of its nightgown: in reality to gain time. For the sudden question rather startled her.

"Who says I was there?" she asked, her face flushing.

"Now, Alice, don't equivocate: it will not serve you. You *were* there, and with him: and you were with him in the same place one day last week also."

"And if I were?" retorted Alice, resolving to meet the matter boldly, and raising her head to do it. "Is it high treason?"

"It is high folly," returned Mrs. Wylde. "Very unjustifiable, considering the ill terms that exist between Rupert and the lord, and that he is forbidden the house."

"Rupert is not on ill terms with me. If we—if we chance to meet, I may surely speak to him—and walk a few steps by his side?"

"Don't you do anything so disloyal again, Alice. Rupert Pomeroy has lowered the family with his debts and his ill-courses; the lord feels it keenly; and you, his wife, should at least have the grace not to show countenance to him."

"And pray, mamma, who is it that has brought tales to you of me and my movements?"

"Lettice chanced to see you, and mentioned it to me."

"'Chanced' to mention to you that she saw me last week, and 'chanced' to mention it to you to-day. I should call Lettice a firebrand."



"Nonsense, Alice! Lettice is nothing of the sort. She had no ill-intention in speaking. But, my dear, I beg of you to be cautious. Do not be seen with Rupert Pomeroy again: it would not be pleasant to your husband."

"Oh, of course *he* must be studied!"

"Well," concluded Mrs. Wylde, not altogether liking the rebellion in her daughter's words and manner, "do not forget, Alice, that *I have warned you.*"

Oh, that she had taken the hint! Wilful, mistaken, senseless woman! But for her folly the terrible tragedy that supervened would never have occurred.

It was just as though her mother had spoken to the winds. Nay, the very speaking rendered her present resentful mood only the more resentful. She continued to meet Rupert; partly because she liked to be with him, partly because she knew how angry it would make Guy, and therefore was a kind of revenge upon him. Moreover, as she told herself, she was doing no real harm to anybody: and the pleasure of it would soon be over, for Rupert was going back to London. The post, promised him so long ago, he intended now to look after in earnest. And thus the days went on to the end.

For the end came: in more senses than one.

## CHAPTER XII.

### In the Haunted Room.

It was the day previous to that which was to witness the departure of the abbey guests, and close upon midday. Mrs. Pomeroy had left them to their own



devices, and was going forth to another stolen interview, when on turning out of the abbey gates she encountered Bridget and the baby.

"What are you here for?" she began, in her imperious way. "I ordered you to take the child through the village, up towards the forest."

"I am going, madam. But," added Bridget, dropping her voice, "I have just met Mr. Rupert, and he sent me back with this. He bade me lose no time in giving it into your own hands."

It could scarcely be called a note that the girl held out. It appeared to be a leaf taken from a pocket-book, folded, and tied round with string: as though the writer had not been able to find any better fastening. Mrs. Pomeroy took it gingerly in her fingers, with a suitable show of surprise and reluctance.

"Mr. Rupert sent you with this! To me! Why, what is it, I wonder? What can he want? You need not wait, Bridget."

Bridget turned away with her charge. Her mistress untied the string, and saw a few words in pencil.

*"Don't come to-day. The keep is no longer safe: and I suspect that I am being watched. I will be in the west tower to-night; in the haunted room. Come up there for a minute; I will not keep you longer—just that I may explain. You will find the doors open."*

Mrs. Pomeroy tore the paper into minute bits, and scattered them to the winds. Turning back to the abbey, she shut herself in her chamber and sat down to think.

To say that the words puzzled her would be saying little to express the utter astonishment that filled her



mind. They also alarmed her. "‘I will be in the west tower to-night,’" she soliloquised, repeating the words in the note: "he must surely be out of his senses to say it. He could only get there by passing through the abbey: and that he would not dare attempt just now. What can it mean? There must be some mistake. And the keep no longer safe!" ran on her thoughts, herself slightly shivering. "Has Guy——"

Mrs. Pomeroy stopped. Fright drowned the rest of the words. If Guy had indeed found out that she held these interviews in the old keep, he would be fit to kill her.

A fine state of tremor she was in all day; of suspense; of anxious curiosity to know the best and the worst. But she had no means of satisfying herself; for she dared not walk out on the chance of meeting Rupert. Had he not said he was watched? Perhaps she was watched also? And what Rupert could have meant about the west tower was beyond the bounds of imagination to divine. Mrs. Pomeroy did not attempt to go to it.

The following morning witnessed the departure of the guests. At least, of most of them. It was the 17th of October: a day to be darkly noted henceforth in the annals of the Pomeroyes as the most terrible that had ever dawned for them. Three or four of Guy's particular friends, men, would remain a day or two longer: on the morrow a great onslaught was to be made on the pheasants, and they stayed for it.

At one o'clock Bridget came in from her walk with the baby, and Mrs. Pomeroy, an intensely fond mother, ran upstairs. She was taking the baby from Bridget



when the woman gave her another note. Mrs. Pomeroy opened it.

"Why did you not come? I waited for you in the west tower for three hours. I saw you open your chamber window and look out; but the casement where I stood lay in deep shade, and I deemed it might be unwise to open it, or to make any signal. I shall be there again this evening: come for an instant, as I leave for good to-morrow. You will find the doors open. I have chosen the west tower as being perhaps the only place where I should never be looked for. R."

So ran the note: and Mrs. Pomeroy, reading it a second and a third time, thought surely magic must be at work. That Rupert was not deceiving her in saying he had waited for her in the west tower, she felt sure—and, indeed, to what end would he deceive her? Yet—how could he have ascended to it? It was hardly possible that Rupert could have passed through the abbey and got Jerome's keys without being seen by the servants. Could it be that he had bribed the servants—had talked over old Jerome? She hardly thought it; for they were all true, heart and soul, to their reigning lord, and the dissension between him and Rupert was no secret. At the best, it was dangerous. Dangerous for Rupert to attempt anything of the kind; dangerous for him to go up to the west tower. But it would be far more dangerous for her to go—and that she was resolving to do. Full of sinful dissimulation—dissimulation in such a cause is nothing less than sin—she began scheming how she could best contrive to get up to the west wing unperceived.

She was not feeling well, she told her mother in



the afternoon. She told her husband so, making a merit of the necessity of speaking to him, and speaking civilly. She should get them to excuse her at the dinner-table: sick of the continual feasting, weary after the exertion of playing hostess to so many guests, she should take a cup of tea in her own room in preference to dinner; perhaps should go to bed; and her mother could head the table for once for Guy and the two or three men who remained. No opposition was made to this, either by her mother or the lord: and all things seemed to go on smoothly for her scheme.

Evening came. Dinner was again laid in the state banqueting-hall below, though so few would this time partake of it; and when they were seated safely at table, Mrs. Wylde facing Guy, Alice's time was come.

Trembling and shaking, not so much at the deceit she was enacting, as at the thought of penetrating by dark—or rather by moonlight, for the moon shone full and bright—to the west tower and that haunted room in it, Mrs. Pomeroy prepared to set forth. She had felt a horror of the room ever since the day of the accident to the picture, and a vexed feeling had rested on her mind for having gone to it in the teeth of the expressed wishes of Guy; but, to meet Rupert and say farewell to him, she was ready to dare it now.

Quitting her apartments, watching her opportunities so that she might escape the eyes of the servants, sheltering herself now in this corner, now in that, Mrs. Pomeroy got safely below into the cloisters, and thence into the north wing. The north tower door stood open for her, and she ascended its stairs. Whether she would have had courage to go through the rooms of



the west wing alone remains unsolved, for there, at the top of the stairs, stood Rupert.

"Where's Guy?" he whispered, as he took her hand in greeting; and the anxious question proved that he was not easy as to Guy.

"At dinner in the banquet-hall. I told him I was ill and could not go down. He thinks, no doubt, that I am sulky."

Rupert descended to lock the door, and make all secure; but as they went on into the next rooms, she shook so that he was obliged to hold her. *She* was not easy, either.

"Rupert, this is what I ought not to do, and I would not have come had I known how else to see you. But I am so terribly anxious about the keep; I have had no peace since that first note of yours, and I wanted to ask you what had happened. Oh, dear! must we go into that haunted chamber?"

"It will be pleasanter for you because you can sit down," he answered, pushing open the door of the room.

The moonlight shone into the chamber, revealing its ghastliness—and ghastly enough it looked by this light to the imagination of Mrs. Pomeroy. It shone on the mysterious picture, and on the defacure right up it, caused by the burn, when she had accidentally held the candle too close. Whether the canvas was damp, or whether it was in a degree fire-proof, or whether the spirit of the nun was present to protect her own image and property, was uncertain; but all the burn had done was to smoulder away into smoke, destroying a portion of the picture, leaving an ugly black stream stretching upwards and across; but,



strangely enough, sparing alike the face and the prediction. As Mrs. Pomeroy now saw how little damage had been done, compared with the wholesale destruction she had fancied, she thought old Jerome must have been very awkward and clumsy to scorch his hands so much. All things were as they had been left that night. The lord had given no orders upon the matter, and the servants had been only too content not to meddle of their own accord. Perhaps in the subsequent bustle, attendant upon the birth of the little girl, Guy had forgotten all about it. Or, it might have been—it might just have been—that Guy had taken care to assure himself of the amount of the injury; and, finding it not great, that the chief features of the picture remained, had concluded the destruction foretold was not yet accomplished, and therefore left it alone as before. This would accuse him, however, of a belief in the superstition.

The prediction was in Mrs. Pomeroy's mind as she stood there in the moonlight, every line, every word; the lines were ringing in her ears with an ominous sound.

“When Pomeroy's heir goes forth a wife to win,  
And Pomeroy's heir goes forth in vain:  
When Pomeroy's lord by a lie doth gain,  
Then woe to the Pomeroy's twain and twain.”

Ominous indeed! More ominous\* than they had ever sounded before. She heaved a deep sigh, and turned away from the picture. Rupert crossed the room, and took up his standing by the window.

“Why do you sigh?” he asked.

“Why do I sigh? I have enough to make me sigh, taking one thing with another. And I am in mortal dread of Guy's finding out that I have met



you. Have you been dining out?" she added, suddenly noticing that he wore black clothes.

"Ay, at Knox's. I had to come away at the second course."

"But how did you manage to get up here?" she exclaimed, sitting down on the old velvet-covered couch, to be more at her ease while she put her questions. "I feel bewildered: I cannot make it out. How many of the servants saw you pass the corridors?"

"Not one of them, either last night or to-night. I took care."

"But, Rupert, a lot of them are always round about Jerome's key-closet."

"They did not see me; and, if they had seen, they could not have known me. Look here."

He suddenly enveloped himself in a friar's grey cloak, throwing the capuchin—or hood, as the English call it—over his head, so as to conceal his face effectually: just as a fair dame does, when she goes out of heated rooms at night.

"And your hat?"

"I wore none. I got Father Andrew to lend this cloak to me yesterday," he continued, turning himself round in the moonlight for Mrs. Pomeroy's inspection. "He wanted to know what midnight expedition I was bent upon. Sly dogs, our priests," laughed Rupert; "they know the use of the capuchin themselves——"

"Oh, Rupert!" she interrupted, her tone savouring of rebuke, "Father Andrew is as good as he can be."

"I believe he is. I was only joking. He likes a joke himself," added Rupert, speaking out of the



hood. "Had any of the servants seen me in this attire, far from recognising me, they would have flown away scared, thinking the nun there," pointing to the picture, "was abroad to-night."

He threw off the cloak as he spoke. Mrs. Pomeroy rose, went to the window and peeped out.

"Caution, Alice. The moon is bright, and your face might be discerned here from the house. Had she not been under the dark clouds last night, you might have seen mine."

"I thought it utterly impossible that you could get here: I thought you must have made some great error in saying you should come. How did you get the keys?"

Rupert Pomeroy stole his lips towards her ear. "Filched them! Stepped aside to Jerome's closet-sanctum, and filched them."

"Filched them!" echoed Mrs. Pomeroy. "Jerome keeps it locked — even if you contrived to escape meeting the servants."

"It is not always locked; and luck favoured me: it often has. I have had possession of the keys from last night to this."

She thought his manner strange: lighter than customary when with her. He appeared to speak in a laughing, insincere sort of way, as though he were making game of her, or else of his own assertions. Years and years afterwards she remembered it.

"How very imprudent! If Jerome had missed them to-day the whole abbey might have been roused."

"No fear," laughed Rupert again. "Jerome would not miss them."

"Rupert!" she suddenly exclaimed, a light break-



ing in upon her, "Jerome has aided you to come here!"

"No he has not. Not a soul has aided me, save Father Andrew, in the loan of the capuchin; little guessed he that it was to steal a visit to the Lady of Pomeroy. Jerome has aided me in another way, though—you do not ask about the keep."

"I have been putting it off," she replied, sitting down again on the couch. "The thought of it frightens me."

"We have had a spy upon us, Alice, as sure as that we are here. Whether the lord has found out anything for himself, or whether he has been put on the scent by others, I cannot say: I think it is the latter; for, if he had watched you to the keep, he would most certainly have pounced in upon you."

"But how did you learn anything at all?" she interrupted, not allowing him to go on steadily. Rupert smiled at her impatience. He was leaning against the wall beside the casement, his arms folded.

"I learned it through Jerome. Yesterday he made his appearance at Gaunt's, and began talking to me about the keep in a low whisper, though Gaunt, and his housekeeper, old Nanny, were both abroad and I had the place to myself——"

"What did he say? What did he say?"

"If you interrupt me like this we shall never get to the end of the story," laughed Rupert. And as the reader may be saying the same, it may be as well to give it as it occurred.

Jerome made his appearance at the gamekeeper's lodge the previous morning, as you have now heard, voice, tread, manner alike stealthy, just as a school-



boy's when he is at some mischief. "Mr. Rupert," he began, "do you go at all to the keep?"

"Why?" asked Rupert.

"But do you, sir?"

"I have been in there once or twice."

"Ah, I was sure of it!" cried old Jerome. "I wish you'd go away from the village, sir, until matters are smother between you and the lord: ever since that quarrel at the abbey the other night, a feeling has been upon me that worse might come. This morning before breakfast the lord came to me: 'To whom have you entrusted the key of the keep?' he asked: and I saw by his stern eye that something was wrong. 'It has not been out of my custody since the late lord died,' I answered. 'You lie, Jerome,' he cried: 'You have lent it to my brother, Rupert Pomeroy. Or else you have kept it so loosely, that somebody has been able to get possession of it for him.' Well, Mr. Rupert, with that we went on to the key closet, which I unlocked; and in my flurry I looked in the wrong niche for the key, and did not see it. The lord stood by with folded arms. 'I thought you were faithful,' he said, and it made my old eyes water, for faithful I am and have ever been to the Lords of Pomeroy—and I am not the less so to you, Mr. Rupert, so far as I can be. The lord saw my distress. 'Some one was in the keep yesterday, Jerome,' he said in a kinder tone: 'I tried the spring of the private door, and could not get in, therefore somebody must have been there and had got the bar up.' 'Here's the key, Lord of Pomeroy,' I said, showing it to him: 'in my haste I looked in the wrong place. I have not given it to Mr. Rupert.' 'Then,'



said the lord, when he saw the key, 'the secret of the spring must be known to some person—and the most likely person is my brother Rupert: who else would dare to meddle with the keep?' And so, Mr. Rupert," added the old man, "I thought it my duty to come and tell you this, for I conclude, sir, it was you who went into it."

Such was the story Rupert repeated to Mrs. Pomeroy. Ere it was concluded, she rose in terror and grasped Rupert's arm; terror at the thought of what might have come of it, had the door of the keep not been barred. It is true that the worst the lord could have seen (and this has been said before) was Rupert lodged on his high shelf, and Mrs. Pomeroy swaying herself on the low stool opposite, abusing himself confidentially: but that would be quite enough, as we all must allow, to raise the ire of most husbands, more especially one so fiery as the haughty Lord of Pomeroy.

"Jerome added that Guy took possession of the key," continued Rupert to Mrs. Pomeroy, "and reiterated his warning to me not to enter the keep again. The foolish old fellow actually had tears in his eyes. I fancy he knows you were there with me."

"Oh!" she screamed.

"I gathered it from a remark he made—that one of the maids had seen you walking with me by the keep. Confound all women's tongues! And now, Alice, you know why I sent you that first note by Bridget——"

"If she had shown it to anyone?" gasped Mrs. Pomeroy.

"Who? Bridget? No fear. She is one of those who are true to the Pomeroyes, heart and soul. And I



really was unable to think of any safe place but this, where we could meet for an explanation and say farewell. Guy is as sly as a fox: and as keen once his doubts are aroused. Of all places, he'd never think of the haunted room."

"Do you really go to-morrow?"

"I go to-morrow. I should have gone to-day had you come last night. It may be better that I should be away, as old Jerome says. Badly though Guy has treated me, I don't wish to sow dissension in his home: and my staying here might result in that."

She was weeping silently. Rupert Pomeroy was very dear to her, and she was about to lose sight of him, perhaps for ever: but she, as silently, wiped away the tears, so that he should see them not.

There is an expressive Italian proverb—I forget precisely how it runs, but the sense is, that for the debtor's bond and the stolen interview, time flies on wings. On wings, most certainly, it appeared to fly for those in the haunted room. Mrs. Pomeroy may have been unconscious of its flitting; let her answer it; but when the courtyard clock rang out ten, she was still there.

With a faint cry of dismay she started up and approached the window. Was it indeed ten?—or only nine? She strained her eyes on the clock, for it was above the entrance archway, and faced her; but, strain them as she would, she could not distinguish the hands: the dial was too far off. Rupert followed her, though little cared he what the hour might be.

"Have you a watch, Rupert?"

"No, I left mine at Gaunt's: the spring's broken."



"I do fear it was ten that struck. And, what if Guy should have been up, and missed me? I must go at once; without delay."

As she turned from the window, accustomed now to the faint light of the room, she distinguished a tall dark figure standing up, right against the picture. Fascinated and terror stricken she gazed; not with ghostly terror, but with terror far more ominous and real—for too well did she discern the grand outlines of that form, and knew it to be no other than her husband's. Rupert, who had a good sight, was peering at the opposite clock, when he found himself suddenly and unexpectedly startled by his companion's seizing hold of him and shrieking out in her agony of shame—"Oh Rupert! Rupert!" For surely it was nothing else than shame, to her, to be caught in this clandestine interview!

The Lord of Pomeroy strode forward, his eyes glaring, his white features terribly livid in the moonlight. How stealthily he must have come up! And—how long had he been there?



## CHAPTER XIII.

## The Climax.

WHAT a terrible situation it was! The moonlight streaming in upon the haunted room, with all its ghostly associations, and upon Guy Pomeroy standing against the picture: Guy, who had come to interrupt the interview. His guilty wife—guilty, at any rate, of mean duplicity to him—cowered in her terror. Rupert, turning sharply round from the window at her cry, wondered what the matter could be.

The Lord of Pomeroy strode forward, his white features livid in the moonlight. Thrusting his wife out of reach of harm, spurning her with his foot, for in her dismay and fear she sank to the ground of her own accord, he drew a double-barrelled pistol upon his brother. The ball missed him, entering the dark wainscoting: and yet the Lord of Pomeroy had a sure hand in general. Ere he could draw again, Rupert closed with him, and they grappled for the weapon. Mrs. Pomeroy heard the deadly scuffle, as she sped, gasping and moaning, from the chamber, through the rooms of the west wing, and gained the stairs of the north tower. In her haste and terror she fell down them against the door below: and just then she thought she heard the noise of the second barrel, but was not sure.

Up again in a moment. She seized the key which Rupert had left in the door; but whether she turned



it, or whether it was previously unlocked, she never knew. Probably the lord had left it unlocked when he entered: though, how he had contrived to enter, considering that Rupert had locked the door on the inside and left the key in it, was a mystery. Perhaps Rupert in his carelessness, his fancied security, had not locked it.

The door, opening into the cloisters, stood ajar. Mrs. Pomeroy flew out, sank down on one of the green benches of the quadrangle, clasped its arm tightly, and hid her face on it—just as we clasp the nearest support for protection on awaking from a terrific dream. She moaned under her breath; not aloud, lest anyone about should hear; she stilled her sobs of remorse and agony: and then she cast stealthy glances up to the window of the haunted room.

Trembling, moaning, cowering; feeling that to die would be a mercy: even the wainscot, which had received the ball, she could envy, and wish it had been her own bosom: Mrs. Pomeroy sat there till the clock went the quarter-past ten. Her ear was on the stretch to listen for her husband's footsteps, descending; at their first distant echo, she would have crept, like a worm, underneath the bench, in her sense of shame. If he saw her there, would he come out and put her to death?

But the probability was that he would stalk straight onwards through the cloisters. And Rupert?—how would he come?

"Can't I go into the lady's room yet?" she heard one of the servants say, who appeared to meet another in the passage. "Getting on for eleven o'clock, and it's not put to rights for the night."



"No," replied the voice of Theresa. "The lady said she should try and sleep her headache off: I was not to go to her room, on any account, unless she rang. The door's fast."

Mrs. Pomeroy shuddered, and held the bench convulsively.

The minutes rolled by, almost killing her with their slow protraction, and the clock chimed the half-hour. In that one half-hour she seemed to have lived the agony of a whole lifetime. Neither had come down; neither Guy nor Rupert; of that she felt certain, for her ears were strung to a strange fineness. She gazed up at the window; an unbroken gaze now. What was taking place there? Were those two men, meted in height and strength, perhaps in ferocity, struggling on with each other until one or the other should be overcome, struck to death? *Which* would conquer? In this terrible suspense she continued, until the clock struck eleven. A whole hour, and neither had appeared! Were *both* dead? Her heart and throat were working, her ears singing.

She could not bear it longer. It seemed that her brain was giving way. Slowly, cautiously, a step at a time, she stole through the cloisters to the staircase door, put her head up, and listened. There was not the slightest sound. Up still, a stair at a time, and now another, went she; and again she stopped to listen. Nothing—nothing. And so on, through the west wing to the last room in it, silently and creepingly. She paused at the door of the west tower, of the haunted room: little thought she of supernatural visitants now, the bodily ones were filling every crevice



of her imagination. The door was not closed, only pushed to, and the same silence reigned within—a silence that was every moment becoming more awful. She would have given half her life to hear one of Guy's oaths, or Rupert's sarcasms. Dead—were they?—and for her?

She pushed the door open, and then shrank back and drew up against the wall, lest the movement should have caused alarm; but neither sound of alarm nor anything else issued forth to indicate that the place was tenanted; so, pulling back the drapery, she peeped in. She had come out of the lighted quadrangle, and her eyes could see, as yet, nothing in the room but darkness; the moon, at that moment, had gone under a cloud, No: still there was no movement, no sound, and she ventured to enter the room. She was stealing towards the window, a vague intention of standing there—whence she could look below and seem less lonely until she should become accustomed to the darkness—floating through her scarcely sane brain, when she fell over something. Putting out her hand to save herself from quite falling, it touched—either a hand or a face. It seemed like the latter—and it was cold, with the coldness of death.

Her nerves could bear no more: this was the climax. Uttering shriek upon shriek, and tearing along as if the dead man were coming behind her, down she flew again in all the terror of superstition. The noise penetrated to the abbey. The servants came forth, bearing lights; the guests, who had then come to the quadrangle with their cigars, ran in the same direction—all to meet Mrs. Pomeroy, her face white; her eyes starting.



The servants caught her; and she lay, convulsed, in their arms. Mrs. Wylde came up.

All crowded round Mrs. Pomeroy, one universal sense of consternation prevailing. Emotion and fear had brought on something like a fit, attended with hysterical shrieks. Speak, she could not; but she shudderingly pointed, now to the stairs of the north tower, now to the windows of the haunted room in the west one. What she could mean by indicating the north tower no one was able to understand; for, that it should be open, was suspected by none. But the other movement was more readily understood, and the servants called out simultaneously, "She has seen the ghost!"

"Go, go," she gave utterance to at length, "*there*," pointing to the haunted room. "Some one is lying dead."

That her words should be looked upon as the ravings of a not sane brain was natural; nevertheless, old Jerome crept away to his key-closet, and then to the north tower. Had he discovered that his keys were missing? He came back from the staircase with a face as apprehensive as his lady's.

"Who will go with me?" he said, looking first at the gentlemen and then at the men-servants. "If they are at warfare, one man will be powerless to part them."

All were ready to go, none comprehending what they were to go for, or what there was to do: and they went in a body towards the stairs, bearing several lights. One of the guests, Lord Sones, drew Jerome apart.



"What do you suspect?" he asked.

"I suspect—I suspect there may be a dispute," Jerome slowly said.

"Between whom?"

"Nay, my lord, but I know nothing. Don't detain me."

Jerome took a light from the hands of one of the servants, walked quietly before them, and led the way up through the west wing. At the door of the haunted room he halted, turning round to face those who were following.

"I must go in first alone," said he, his tone one of assured authority. "I am the oldest retainer in the family, in the confidence of the Lords of Pomeroy, and I demand it."

He passed in and let fall the hangings, no one attempting to dissent; but in less than a minute he held them up and spoke, his voice sounding like a wail.

"Walk in now. Oh, woe, woe!"

Holding their breaths, the crowd pressed in, one upon another. Woe, woe! as Jerome had said: for there lay one of the combatants in the arms of death.

"It is the Lord of Pomeroy!" cried the affrighted spectators.

"It is the lord, and my dear master," wailed Jerome, with a burst of tears: and he crossed himself and raised his hands to heaven.

Still and motionless it lay, that fine form, its face turned upwards; the cold face that Alice had touched.

So, Rupert had mastered: had obtained possession



of the pistol in their mortal struggle, and shot his unfortunate brother!—for the bullet was subsequently found in the head. The lower part of the face was also bruised and battered, as if by blows.

It must be remembered that those now gazing on him possessed no clue whatever to the tragedy, its cause, or action; neither could they give the slightest guess as to the perpetrator: Jerome doubtless suspected, but he kept silence. Horror-stricken, bewildered, sick, they began to look about the room for a solution of the mystery, throwing the light of their torches hither and thither. Who had done it—how and why had it been done? Nothing was to be seen save the ordinary and dilapidated furniture, and the dust on the floor, disturbed as by a scuffle, and the nun's damaged picture resting so still in its frame.

"What's this?" exclaimed one of the guests, snatching up a dark grey cloak, and exhibiting it to their view. "This is not the lord's. Ah, ha! this will lead to a discovery."

"I know that," interrupted a servant. "It is Father Andrew's capuchin. He wears it sometimes when he comes to the abbey on a winter's night."

"Father Andrew's!" echoed the disbelieving assemblage; and they began to abuse the speaker.

"I could swear to it," doggedly persisted the man: "I know it by those two rents at the tail of the skirt. The father said he got it caught in a gate one windy evening."

Father Andrew, a priest, and an unoffending man, attack the lord!—for of course the words bore that implication. The thing was not likely; it was inex-



plicable. Jerome, who had sat down on the edge of the velvet settee, lifted his face of misery, and slightly shook his head in dissent. That the motive had nothing to do with robbery was apparent; the lord's signet ring was on his finger, and his valuable gold watch and chain had not been touched. When his pockets came to be examined afterwards, their contents were found safe: keys, pocket-book, purse, and handkerchief with the great crest and supporters, only used by the Lords of Pomeroy—the younger sons used the simple crest. The clothes were much torn, proving how severe had been the scuffle. But Father Andrew! what could have brought *him* in the fray, even as a spectator—or his capuchin? And where had he got to?—and where was the murderer?

The question, as to the priest, was soon set at rest; for, into the room walked the reverend father himself, his form as round-about, his red face as merry as ever, presenting quite an opposite appearance to all popular notions of a midnight assassin. The terrified women below had sent for him in haste.

"What's to do?" cried he, on the broad grin. "Somebody seen the ghost?"

They made way for him, and threw the light on the floor. Father Andrew's countenance changed. He stepped back awestruck.

"The lord!" whispered he. "Is he dead? How was it done?"

"It is the lord: and he has been attacked and murdered," hastily spoke one of the upper servants. "Does your reverence know this?" added the speaker, picking up the cloak.



"That's mine," said the priest.

"How came it here, father?"

A light, as of horror, seemed to break upon him  
"I lent that to—to—a friend," he stammered.

"To whom?"

The priest was silent. He did not seem inclined to say. Lord Sones took a step forward. He was not a Roman Catholic.

"Sir," said he to Father Andrew, "it appears to me, as it no doubt appears to those who stand here with me—my fellow guests at this house, and the valued old retainers of my poor friend, lying there—that it is incumbent upon you to speak, and say to whom you lent the cloak. A most foul deed has been done: and that cloak is the only clue we possess at present to its apparent perpetrator. You must state freely to whom you lent it."

"Rupert Pomeroy. He came to me yesterday and borrowed it."

There was a pause of dismay: and poor Father Andrew, who had spoken unwillingly in his allegiance to the Pomeroy, and because there was no escaping it, gave vent to a groan of pain.



## CHAPTER XIV.

## Escaped.

THE public commotion was without parallel. Nothing like unto it had ever stirred up that remote and quiet district. The Lord of Pomeroy had been murdered (it was thus people put it) by his brother Rupert.

The police took the affair into their hands at once, and collected details at will. Thus, while the death-flag waved over the abbey gateway, and the poor dead lord lay in state in the chapel, according to the Pomeroy forms and customs, a great deal became known of the few days preceding his death, and of the movements of his false and foolish wife. The secret visits paid by herself and Rupert to the old keep were discovered and talked of. Not a single half-hour, as it seemed, had she lingered there, but it was declared now. The servants, it appeared, had seen her enter it, or leave it, Rupert with her, more often than was thought for: and the police, metaphorically speaking, turned the servants inside out. And though these visits had been innocent, in one sense of the word, as the reader knows, can it be wondered at that they assumed a guilty aspect now, regarded in the light of the tragedy that had supervened?

Nearly the first thing the police did, on being called



in, was (after visiting the west wing, and locking it up), to thoroughly search the inhabited parts of the abbey, especially the apartments personally occupied by the Lord of Pomeroy. Not to find Rupert; the intelligent reader will understand that; but to come, if possible, upon some clue that would throw light upon the meeting between the brothers, and its deadly ending. During this search they found the *second* note written by Rupert to Mrs. Pomeroy, asking her to come to him in the west tower. The first note she had torn into small pieces and scattered them to the winds, as may be remembered; pity, for her own good name, but she had also torn the second. And how she came not to do it must remain unaccounted for: unless it can be explained by that fatality which so often attends the commission of folly and sin. This note was taken possession of by the police. Its delivery to Mrs. Pomeroy was traced, by dint of close enquiry, to Bridget, who had to confess to her share in it and that she received it from Mr. Rupert. She had to confess that it was the second note thus delivered: she had to confess that she had more than once seen her mistress and Mr. Rupert enter, or leave, the keep. Never had the Pomeroy's a more faithful adherent than Bridget, but she could not help speaking now. The result was not favourable to Mrs. Pomeroy. The bare imprudence and folly of those meetings would have been enough to condemn her: and upon such matters the worst construction is generally put.

Alice Pomeroy's condition was pitiable. She lay in her room in a semi-passive state; moanings, half suppressed, escaping her lips from morning till night, from night till morning; her anguish of mind more than pen



can paint. It was thought by the medical men that she would have lost her reason.

The police could make nothing of her: she neither admitted nor denied anything. When questioned by the coroner in presence of the jury, she said little more. Having been the only witness to the quarrel, she had to be questioned, otherwise they would have spared her. She lay, wrapped in shawls, on the sofa in her bedroom when the deputation was admitted, being really too weak and prostrate to receive them otherwise. She had thought it no harm to go to the west tower to say farewell to her husband's brother, she murmured; her husband came up; he fired off a pistol, which did no harm, and then there ensued a scuffle: she was frightened, and got away. No more did she say than that: and, indeed, there was no more to say. The coroner, a man of gentlemanly feeling, asked her no inconvenient or personal questions. He retired with his jury; and they brought in a verdict of wilful murder against Rupert Pomeroy.

Rupert had escaped. How, or by what means, none could tell. That he was still concealed somewhere in Abbeyland, perhaps even in the abbey itself, was conjectured by the police, and the search after him was keen. Not a house, rich or poor, but found itself pounced upon by the police at all kinds of unexpected and unreasonable hours, sometimes when its inmates were abed and asleep; but without effect. Suspicion was directed to the Knoll, the residence of Rupert's great friend, Charles Knox: it was there that Rupert had dined on the fatal evening. Mr. Knox threw his house open to the search, but Rupert was not found. No person whatever, so far as could be learnt, had



seen Rupert since the fatal fray. Gaunt testified, and with truth, that he had not returned to the lodge; and the things pertaining to Rupert remained there unclaimed. Bills, headed "Murder," in large letters, were posted about, offering a reward of £200 for the apprehension of Rupert Pomeroy. Mrs. Pomeroy would lie shivering in her bed, hoping, praying that he might not be taken. The life of one brother was enough for her to have sacrificed, without the other.

She did not conceal from herself that it was from her own folly, her sin—call it by which name you will—that the terrible catastrophe had come. In these dread moments of bitter remorse, the conscience does not play at hide and seek with itself. Alice Pomeroy's very soul was wrung with anguish. Over and over again she wished she had been dead, ere the calamity had fallen.

The great fear, that Rupert would be taken, lay ever upon her. Never did her chamber door open but it caused her a shiver of dread, lest tidings were being brought that he was found. How he had escaped from the west tower she could not imagine: unless, indeed, he had followed her down almost immediately, before her ears and heart got on the rack, and so made good his stealthy exit. Now and again she felt a dread that he might still be concealed in the west wing; but as day after day wore on, this wore away. Moreover, the police had thoroughly searched there. Mrs. Wylde remained at the abbey, a scared look perpetually on her face, a shrinking manner palpable to all.

Tidings of the fatal concurrence were dispatched to Miss Pomeroy, and she arrived at the Abbey accompanied by her brother-in-law, Henry Capel. Shocked,



distressed, horrified, Joan listened as she learnt the details of her brother's death, and of the disgrace brought on the house by the woman he had made his wife. Whether innocent of actual crime—as she might be—or whether guilty of it, Alice Pomeroy had as surely been the originating cause of the calamity, had as directly led to it, as anyone can be or do in this world. This was Guy's reward!—for having raised that inferior-born woman to his own rank, for having loved her with a passionate love, and showered down daily care upon her—this!

In her bitter grief, her anguish, Joan reproached Alice. Not loudly, not severely, but with stern truth. Alice shivered, and answered nothing. Mrs. Wylde would have taken up her daughter's defence, but she began in a lame, shame-faced sort of manner, and Joan swept out of the chamber. Mrs. Wylde could not soften facts; she could not bring back to life that unhappy man who had been hurled to death, and died unshriven. So long as Joan should live, her heart would ache for him, her most ill-fated brother.

And in the height of the commotion the place was in, which had not one whit subsided, in the midst of the active search for Rupert, the day fixed for the interment arrived. A sad funeral; a solemn ceremony; that which attended to his last resting place Guy, Lord of Pomeroy; made doubly sad and solemn by the terrible circumstances of his death. People came to it from far and near, as they had come to that of the old lord; ecclesiastics high in the Catholic church; nobles, friends, relatives, retainers. Leolin Pomeroy crossed the channel and officiated as chief mourner.



Up to the last hour Guy had lain in state in the chapel in his coffin. Many a tear was dropped over him, many a sob suppressed. Pomeroy would not know a better lord. Guy might have been stern and cold of manner, but he was generous of heart. He would have righted wrongs, but never inflicted them; he would have succoured, but not oppressed.

And so, with all this state and ceremony, that was so needless and that seemed so inappropriate under the circumstances, but that was deemed necessary by the family, when burying its lord, Guy was put into the cold chapel vault by the side of his late father; and the people went home, leaving him there. And the death-flag, waving over the abbey gateway, was exchanged for the hatchment. And Joan, in her superstitious heart, said that this had been the working-out of the prediction. Or, perhaps but its commencement! Who knew?

It was on his return home after the funeral that Jerome craved an interview with Joan. He came to ask permission to retire at once from the abbey and take up his abode in the keep—which place, as may be remembered, had been bestowed upon him by the old lord for life, whenever he should choose to retire to it. The calamity had sensibly affected Jerome, this faithful attendant of the Pomeroy. Since its occurrence he had worn a kind of dazed look; his manner, as he went about, was timorous, just as if he feared his own shadow. His occupation at the abbey was gone, he told Joan, when preferring his request, and the tears rolled down his cheeks as he said it. Mrs. Pomeroy he declined to serve; and the new lord, George, was not there. For the renegade, Rupert—



now still being hunted for that he might answer at his country's bar for his crime—could not inherit, and George was the Lord of Pomeroy.

"Why ask my permission, Jerome?" was Joan's sad rejoinder. "What have I to do with it?"

"Nay, Miss Joan, who else is there to ask?" replied Jerome. "You are the only one left: Mr. Leolin, he will be gone again to-morrow. I cannot stay here, Miss Joan; no, not another night; the abbey is too painful to me now: my lord's gone, and it is no longer the place for me. I'd like to be away from it, ay, before sunset."

"As you will, Jerome," she answered. "It is painful to others as well as to you. I leave it myself to-morrow. Stay a moment," she added, as he was turning away after speaking his thanks, "I want to put a few questions to you which I have hitherto shrunk from. Things are not clear to me, Jerome; not clear. Give me your own version of what happened on that fatal night."

Jerome pushed his grey hair from his brow, let his hand rest on his right temple, and paused. Joan thought he was recalling the facts to his memory.

"We all went up to the west tower together, Miss Joan, the guests that were staying here and many of the men-servants. I ——"

"Not that; I understand all that," interrupted Joan. "What I cannot quite fathom is, how he, my unhappy brother, Rupert, got up to the west tower."

"It has been a sort of mystery to us all, madam." Joan dropped her voice to a whisper. "I cannot



help suspecting that you must have helped him, Jerome. Both nights."

"Before the holy saints that hear me"—and Jerome crossed himself—"I did not. I declare to you, Miss Joan, that I knew nothing of Mr. Rupert's having gone there either night. I got to know of his visits to the keep through the lord questioning me, and I had heard the maids talk of it besides; and, to confess the truth, ma'am, now all's over, I took upon myself to warn Mr. Rupert not to go to the keep again, and to ask him to leave Abbeyland until things should be smother between him and the lord. But I never knew of his visits to the west tower: any such idea, as that he would attempt to go to it—that he *could* go to it—did not enter my mind. Far from suspecting he had gone up the last night, I did not know but what he had left for London—and I most devoutly hoped it."

Joan could not get rid of her puzzle. "Jerome, it seems next door to an impossibility that he could have got to your closet and taken the keys without being seen. Through the cloisters and passages he might perhaps escape notice; but your key-closet is in the very heart of the inhabited apartments."

Jerome looked ill at ease as he answered. Joan did not now doubt him, but an idea stole over her that he might suspect some one of his fellow servants.

"He must have managed to do it, Miss Joan. He was in Father Andrew's capuchin, and might easily have been mistaken for him."

"Hardly," replied Joan; "the one is slender and very tall; the other short and stout."

"The servants were about elsewhere both nights,"



pleaded Jerome, as if he would excuse their lack of observation. "When a state dinner's on in the banquet hall, there's always a great deal to do. Mr. Rupert must have known that, and felt pretty safe in risking it."

"Do you suspect any of the servants of aiding him?" she pointedly asked.

"I do not," was Jerome's emphatic, and evidently truthful reply. "Miss Joan, there's not one of them would dare to touch the keys."

"Then you can tell me nothing more of that night than I know, Jerome?"

"Indeed I can't, ma'am," was the old man's faltering reply: and the tears rose to his eyes again as he said it.

Joan sighed. She glanced at the door to make sure it was closed, and then spoke again.

"Can you think, Jerome, where he can be?"

But Jerome, instead of answering, gazed at her beseechingly—as if silently imploring her to drop the subject. Joan fancied that he looked a little bewildered.

"I speak of *him*, Jerome, that most unfortunate Rupert. That he must have speedily followed Mrs. Pomeroy down stairs, as is supposed, and made his escape from the abbey in the general confusion, there can be but little doubt of. Have you any idea where he is?"

"Alas, no," sighed the old man.

Joan wrung her hands. There were moments when the misery that had fallen on their ill-fated house



pressed more heavily upon her than she knew how to bear.

Jerome bowed himself out from Miss Pomeroy's presence, to take up his abode that night for good in the keep. And on the following morning Leolin Pomeroy, with his sister, and Henry Capel, quitted the abbey.

The days went on. No tidings were heard of the unhappy Rupert. But, that he had not yet succeeded in making good his escape from the neighbourhood, appeared to be certain. At least, if the word of Cannel, the butler at the White House, might be trusted.

Two or three nights subsequent to the lord's funeral, Cannel, in returning home from the abbey, whither he had gone on an errand to his mistress, met Rupert. It was in the short, dark, narrow lane, dark from its overhanging trees, that led from the high road to the side of Mrs. Wylde's house. They met face to face. But, before Cannel, in his dismayed surprise, could take a second look, could speak a word, could even as much as mechanically touch his hat, Rupert turned short round, crushed himself through a small gap in the hedge, and was gone. Cannel's hair stood on end. A well-meaning man, but not overburdened with sense at the best of times, he took a few moments to consider what he ought to do, and then ran back to the abbey. Asking for Theresa, he told her of the encounter. Theresa carried the news to Mrs. Wylde. That lady, greatly more dismayed than Cannel—for she hoped with her whole heart Rupert would escape, to avert further consequences and the scandal that must follow—enjoined them both



to secrecy, keeping it also herself. But the fact was suffered to ooze out later. Therefore, unless Cannet's sight deceived him, which was very unlikely, Rupert was then still at Abbeyland. Perhaps—who knew?—he was essaying to make his escape from it that very night.

It was as well, perhaps, that the search after him failed: as, fail it did: for, if taken, he would hardly escape the terrible death to which his country's laws must condemn him. He had been cruel in his vengeance, beating his unfortunate brother to death. The medical men thought that the shot would not have killed immediately: the beating did. Thus Rupert had justly passed out of the succession, to give place to George.

When Mrs. Pomeroy grew sufficiently well to be conversed with, her mother urgently begged of her to return to the White House; to make it her future abode, and never to inhabit the abbey again. After what had happened, it might be thought that it would have been the more seemly course for Mrs. Pomeroy to adopt. She turned, however, a deaf ear to the counsel: for her child's sake, if from no other consideration, she should not quit the abbey. So Mrs. Wylde returned to her house alone, leaving her daughter to her loneliness and her miserable reflections.

Throughout the whole of the long winter Alice Pomeroy never quitted her rooms. Her mother she saw sometimes, and Father Andrew: no one else was admitted to her, save her own personal attendants. Theresa had a close and anxious time of it. There



Mrs. Pomeroy shut herself up, nursing her remorse and her anguish. One lively terror lay ever upon her—that Rupert would be taken.

As spring advanced, and the weather became genial, a sad figure, veiled and draped in crape, might occasionally be seen wandering in the more sheltered parts of the garden, or seated under its gloomiest trees. Even her child she seldom saw: it was left almost entirely to Bridget. She now inhabited only a portion of the front pile of the abbey—that lying between the great entrance gates and the south tower—and her household was a small one. The rest of the numerous servants remained, doing nothing; they were the lord's retainers, and awaited his coming home.

When news of the dire calamity, resulting in Guy's death and his own succession, reached India and George Pomeroy, he lost no time in writing back and appointing an agent, or steward, to act for him until he should return. This was John Gaunt, the gentleman-keeper. Captain Pomeroy endowed him with absolute power and authority: in the abbey and out of it he was to be the unquestioned master. Gaunt, as the time went on, proved to be a most courteous and considerate one.

The new Lord of Pomeroy did not show himself in any hurry to come back and take up his honours. After the lapse of twelve months, or so, Joan wrote to ask the reason why. She did not like the abbey to be without its lord, Mrs. Pomeroy acting as though she were its mistress. In reply to his sister, George said that there existed rumours of war in India, and he did not care to quit the army at such a time. This answer



vexed the Pomeroyes: Joan especially. She had her own opinion.

"I know why he will not come: the true reason," she remarked one day petulantly to Henry Capel.

"What is it?"

"George was always chivalrously considerate to other people's feelings. He stays away out of delicacy to the poor wanderer, Rupert."

Mr. Capel could not understand. "What do you mean, Joan?" he asked.

"In the ordinary course of things Rupert would have come in after Guy," she continued. "As it is, he was passed over for George. George feels that; and he will not, in deference to Rupert's feelings, assume his rights as Lord of Pomeroy."

Henry Capel drew in his lips. "Strange reasoning, Joan. One would almost think *you* wished to show deference to that miserable man."

"No. But you don't know George. The more miserable a person is, the more cautious he would be not to tread upon him. He will stay where he is for a year or two."

And it seemed likely that George would do it, for the "year or two" went by and there was no change. John Gaunt remained in sole power, and never a word had anyone to say against him. Mrs. Pomeroy he treated with the utmost consideration and respect, deferring to her in all matters that properly pertained to her. The world had turned its cold shoulder upon her, but Gaunt would not let her know that he perceived it. Only once did her wishes clash with his.



She suddenly issued orders, some twelve months after her husband's death, for the throwing open, cleansing, and renovating the west wing, and for the barring-up of the west tower. The servants, as in duty bound, carried the orders to Mr. Gaunt, and he at once countermanded them. He waited on Mrs. Pomeroy, and told her he was unable to sanction the order without the consent of the lord. "Write to him for it," said Mrs. Pomeroy, curtly, evidently not pleased at the check.

Gaunt wrote. The answer was received from India as speedily as mail could bring it. It forbade the west wing to be meddled with in any way: neither that nor the tower was to be touched: and a peremptory command to Gaunt was added—to keep the wing locked up, as he had hitherto kept it, not to permit it to be entered on any pretext whatsoever.

"The new lord has got all the Pomeroy superstition upon him," quoth the gossips when they heard this. "He won't have things, up in that wing, altered."

Mrs. Pomeroy was fain to accept the decision. No other choice was left her: the lord was the lord, and Gaunt was acting master. A shrewd suspicion lay upon her, she hardly knew whence derived, that Gaunt held the power to turn her from the abbey if he saw fit: surely, as her conscience told her, she had forfeited the right to insist upon remaining in it if the family should choose to put her forth. During all this time Rupert was still free: he had not been found. A general belief existed that he must have made good his escape to some remote portion of the globe, and was there concealing himself.



The time continued to pass on with little event to mark its progress. George did not return; Rupert made no sign. A question would now and again arise in the minds of his relatives—was Rupert dead? It could not be answered. A report had reached Europe that George had married. It was not confirmed; and his own family scornfully repudiated it, calling it lying gossip. The Lord of Pomeroy was not one to marry privately, without sending proper credentials home; a wife of his could not put her head under a bushel.

But George's non-return began to seriously vex his family. Joan especially resented it. Never was such a thing heard of yet, as for the Lord of Pomeroy to live away from his own domains. To all the letters of remonstrance written to him, George sent back the same good-humoured (and somewhat careless) answer—that they were certainly on the eve of war in India, and he did not like to withdraw in the face of it.

At length when five years, and somewhat more, had elapsed from the time of his accession, Joan grew downright impatient: indignant, perhaps, might be the proper word. She wrote George a severe letter about the duty he owed to Pomeroy, and the obligation that lay upon him to come home without more delay and enter upon his inheritance.

Alas, George Pomeroy never did come home to enter upon it. Before Joan's letter reached the shores of India, war had indeed broken out there, and George fell on the battle field. It was too true. Tidings of the sad event arrived, bringing deep sorrow, for all the world had liked George Pomeroy. Never had it been known for one of the lords to die away from his own domains (as Joan had remarked with re-



ference to the living away), and the abbey mourned that fact as freely as they mourned him. Once more the death-flag waved over the entrance-gates; masses for the repose of his soul were said in the chapel.

And the youngest of the four sons, Leolin succeeded as Lord of Pomeroy.



## PART THE SECOND.

### CHAPTER I.

At the Duchess of St. Ives'.

It was the height of the London season. The night sky above was studded with its stars, as the starry beauties of this lower hemisphere were pressing into one of the greatest and most exclusive houses of the day. Great in its reference to that iron god, fashion; not greater in its size than many another.

It was the town-house of the Duchess of St. Ives, a wealthy widow, only two-and forty yet, and beautiful still. She had ruled the world long on her own account, and now she was ruling it in right of her son. It was the first season he had spent in London since coming of age, and the world was going mad after him. Mothers courted him openly, daughters covertly: for young ladies in those days had not become *fast*, or learnt to enter upon courtship for themselves unblushingly: a great thing it would be to be Duchess of St. Ives!

A well-appointed carriage dashed into the rank, and struggled its way to the door amidst the rest. The Countess of Essington descended from it with daughters three. Yes, the majestic countess, as im-



portant in her own eyes, and daring in her own actions, as the Duchess of St. Ives in hers, had brought them all; the Ladies Mabel, Geraldine, and Anna Hetley. Mabel and Geraldine were like their mother commanding, stately girls, with handsome features, but cold as though they had been carved from Parian marble. Anna was different; she had nothing of majesty or of marble about her: a fair, graceful girl, with soft, shy, merry blue eyes that drooped beneath their long lashes when gazed into, a flushed, dimpled, lovely face, and a pretty mouth too much given to laughing, and to display unconsciously its set of white pearls.

A moment's respite after the reception, and the countess and her daughters were but so many of the brilliant crowd that thronged the rooms. Lady Anna found herself seated next to a young lady with whom they were on terms of close intimacy.

"Have *you* come to-night, Anna? Three of you! What an idea?"

"There was no help for it," laughed Anna. "This is the ball of balls, you know, and Mabel and Geraldine would not give up their privilege of elders; mamma did not wish me to remain away, because—because ——"

"There; go on to the rest. I understand."

"What can be done?" quoth mamma to us this morning at breakfast: 'Geraldine, I wish you would, for once, give up to Anna.' 'Oh dear no,' returned Geraldine; 'it is not to be thought of.' 'Then I shall take you all,' said mamma. '*That's* not to be thought of,' put in Mabel; 'there never was such a thing heard of.' 'I may dare what others would not,' concluded mamma, in her lofty way."



"And that is how you are here?"

"I don't know whether she would really have brought me in spite of Mabel; who is very positive, you know, in her opinions—and mamma gives in to her greatly. Listen yet. The duke called this afternoon, and began talking to me about to-night, wanting to make me promise—oh, I don't know what all—to give him two dances to everybody else's one, and that sort of nonsense. 'I am infinitely obliged to your grace,' I said, making him a demure curtsey, 'but I am not coming.' You should have witnessed his face. 'Not coming!' cried he, when he could find words. 'Certainly not. I am the youngest, and my sisters have precedence over poor me: the inconvenience, you see, of having three demoiselles in a family.' Off went the duke to mamma, and said—I did not listen, but the result is, that I am here."

The young lady-listener sat, playing with her drooping bracelet. "Anna, there need not be any more heart-burnings after the Duke: we may all resign him at once with a good grace, for we shall have to do it. You are in luck."

"Luck at what?" cried Anna, quickly.

"To have gained him. You might be Duchess of St. Ives to-morrow."

"Might I? Nothing of the sort. I'll turn him over to you: or to Mabel."

"You know you might be: and you know you will. Here he comes, true to his allegiance. And now it is good-bye to you for the rest of the evening, I suppose."

Lady Anna glanced towards the Duke of St. Ives. He was threading his way to her amidst difficulties,



for he was set upon and detained on all sides by the ravenous gentlewomen who were angling for him with their subtle lines. "It will take him twenty minutes to get here," laughed Anna.

"Oh, Anna, what a lovely bouquet!" suddenly exclaimed the young lady, observing the flowers for the first time. "Who supplied it?"

"How can I tell?" returned Anna, with downcast eyes and conscious cheek. "It was left for me just before we came out."

"He has taste in flowers, at any rate, if these were arranged under his auspices."

"Who has taste?"

"Who! You can afford this pretty affectation of unconsciousness, now you are sure of him. St. Ives."

"But I am not sure of him," again laughed Anna. "And I am not sure—indeed, I don't think—that he sent the bouquet. Another came, less beautiful: 'Oh, that charming one is the duke's,' cried mamma, pointing to this; 'use that one, Anna:' and I obeyed, saying nothing, but I fancied the other was his."

"The duke would send but the one?"

"Of course not."

"Who sent the other?"

"Can I tell, I say?" returned Lady Anna. "Is not all the world dying to send bouquets to me?" she added, with pretty sauciness. Anna Hetley was in unusual spirits to-night.

The Duke of St. Ives reached her at length, and took her away with him. He was tall; too tall, and too slender; altogether very much like a maypole, with a fair complexion, mild eyes, and a meek, inoffensive face. At Eton he was called "Milky," and he had



never lost the sobriquet. "St. Ives is a milksop still, he has no devil in him," sneered sometimes the fast young men, his friends, who had rather too much of it in them.

The quadrille was walked over, a waltz was got through. Other dances with other partners came, in their turn; and, just as Anna was enjoying a moment's respite in a sheltered corner, another gentleman came up to her, who had but then entered. Not above the middle height, he was yet a distinguished-looking man, his hair of a dark brown shade, his grey eyes clear, and his features very fine.

"Anna," he whispered, in a low, musical voice, whose tones spoke love, if ever love was spoken—"Anna!"

She started and blushed vividly: she had not seen him advancing. "Oh, Leolin!"

"Did you think I was lost?"

"I thought you were never coming. Why are you so late?"

"And I am only here now to tell you I cannot come—if that is not Irish. Stanton—you know Stanton?"

"Yes: a little."

"Well, poor fellow, he has met with an accident to-night, through the bursting of a gun. I was starting to come here when they sent for me: he is in great pain, in shocking spirits, and cannot bear for me to leave him. I told him he must give me half an hour——and I came here to tell you."

"I am so sorry. How——Here comes St. Ives again," she broke off, in a hurried whisper. "Say I am engaged to you, Leolin."



The Duke of St. Ives received his answer, and the other looked at his watch. "I must stay for this one waltz, Anna: the temptation is not to be resisted."

She put her arm within his, and his eyes happened to fall upon the flowers. "They are nicely arranged, Anna, are they not?"

"I knew they came from you," she softly breathed. "This bouquet and another were left. Mamma jumped to the conclusion that the more beautiful one must be from the duke, and ordered me to use it. His lies neglected on the table at home."

"Anna, I shall begin to fear that the duke is dangerous," he said, as he held her, somewhat closer than he need have done, in the whirling waltz.

She smiled and half shook her head, but her shy and pretty eyes were bent to the ground; otherwise he might have seen how full they were of love.

"And now I must not linger another moment," he exclaimed, when the dance was over. "Poor Stanton!"

"Leolin, I don't believe you have spoken a single word to anybody else in the room!"

"I do not think I have: St. Ives excepted. I looked for his mother when I came in, and could not see her."

"I was very nearly not coming, Leolin. We are three of us, you know—and had Lucy not married she would have made a fourth. The duke called to-day and talked to mamma, and *would have* me come."

"You should contrive to give the duke a hint. Good-night, my dearest."

He left her sitting where she was, and quitted the room. Anna's eyes followed him. She saw him step



aside to greet the duchess, she saw him turn when at the door to give herself a last look. With his departure, the evening's happiness had gone out for her.

"I never heard of anything like it!" uttered Lady Anna Hetley, as she stood before her mother the next morning, with crimsoned cheeks. "How stupid he must be!"

"Stupid?" echoed the countess.

"*Was* such a thing ever heard of, mamma? As if he could not have waited till a proper time and season! And what in the world took papa there last night? I don't think he has troubled a ball for years."

"Is anything the matter with Anna?" exclaimed Lady Geraldine, who had entered while her sister was speaking.

"A piece of good fortune is the matter with her," returned the countess. "St. Ives spoke to your papa last night about her."

"Made her an offer?——asked for her?" breathlessly returned Geraldine.

"Yes he did. I knew it was coming to it."

"And what is she grumbling at?"

"We go by the rules of contrary in this land," cried the countess, shrugging her shoulders; "the more happiness is rained upon us, the more we grumble. Grumbling is indigenous to England."

"But think of the stupid way in which he went to work," retorted Anna; "never to say a syllable to me, never to give me a hint of what he was about to do, but to go blundering off-hand to papa! And to speak to him in his own ball-room, at his own house! I wonder papa listened to him."



"What did it signify where he spoke to him?"

"It signifies this—that he ought to have told me first, and not have broken it to papa without my knowledge."

"You must have seen what it was coming to——"

"What is the matter?"

The interruption came from Lady Mabel. She and Geraldine had lain in bed late, as in fact had Lady Essington, and so made their first appearance in a desultory manner when the day was advanced.

"Anna is an idiot," explained Geraldine, in answer to her sister's question, "that's what is the matter. Yes, Anna; I repeat that you must have known what it was coming to. He had flirted enough with you."

"There's the evil," cried Anna. "Men are so much given to flirt now-a-days, that you cannot tell what is flirting and what is real: and woe be to the feelings of any girl who mistakes the false for the genuine. If the Duke of St. Ives has flirted with me—though I hate the word, and I have *not* encouraged him—others have flirted with him. Some of you girls have been ready to pull him to pieces in the contest."

"Mamma, just listen to her—she says she has not encouraged him!" exclaimed Mabel, with a smile.

"I have not encouraged him more than I could help," said Anna. "When he has talked to me, I have answered him; when he has asked me to dance, I have not said No. I like talking, and I like dancing. Was it my place to assume that he was only paving the way to invite me to be Madame la Duchesse?"

"You have worked on for it, though, in your quiet way," retorted Mabel, who was saying all this out



of sheer vexation that the prize should have escaped herself.

"Indeed, indeed, I have not," spoke Anna earnestly. "He has been always seeking me, and I could not avoid that; but I have *not* encouraged him."

Mabel retorted. "Only last night you went to his house, caressing the flowers he left for you."

A suppressed smile crossed Anna's face. "Well, it is done, and it cannot be undone," she rejoined; "but I must repeat, that he has acted as—as—only one gifted with as little brains as the Duke of St. Ives could act."

"What do you mean is done, and can't be undone?"

"His speaking to papa. And I say he has no brains, to go and do it."

Lady Essington lifted her hands. "Take care, my young lady, that you don't show these airs before him; or he may think twice ere he completes the bargain. And here he is—he said he should call early."

But the footsteps ascending the stairs were not the Duke's. They were those of the gentleman with whom Anna had snatched a waltz the previous night, during the brief period of his stay in the crowded rooms. They were the steps of a chieftain, bold and fearless; of one who carried his head erect, and on whose lofty features might be traced the consciousness of a descent, second to none. The servant threw wide the door:

"The Lord of Pomeroy."

The Lord of Pomeroy was not the Duke of St. Ives; and some little disappointment may have been felt by Lady Essington. But, if so, it was but



momentary, for the Lord of Pomeroy was also a favoured visitor. He told them of the painful accident to his friend Stanton: a young man who was attached like himself to one of the embassies abroad, and was just now over here on leave.

Before he had quite finished the recital, the old Dowager Faulcot came in with her two nieces; intimate friends of the Essingtons, who might call early or late. Lady Faulcot began a rare tale of scandal, more interesting in its way than the gun accident to Stanton. In the midst of it Anna escaped to the conservatory, and was followed by the Lord of Pomeroy.

"Leolin, he has asked for me!" she exclaimed, when they were sheltered in that retreat, and beyond the ears in the drawing-room.

"St. Ives?"

"Oh, yes. He spoke to papa last night in the rooms—actually in his own ball-rooms. If he had but spoken to me, I could have given him an answer quietly, and there would have been an end to him, and nobody the wiser. I am not sure that it is honourable to tell you this, Leolin; but—but—papa accepted him."

Leolin Pomeroy's brow flushed, for he loved her with a passionate and powerful love: but the pride of his race rose within him. The Lord of Pomeroy, secure in his remote and high descent of untold generations, afraid of the new Duke of St. Ives, whose ancestors, seventy years ago, were of the people! Anna glanced at him timidly, her lovely eyes full of tears. He drew her to him, and bent down his face with a tender whisper.



"Which shall it be?—the Duke of St. Ives, or the Lord of Pomeroy?"

"Oh, Leolin, why do you ask me? You know; you know."

"Is your father at home?" he inquired, between his kisses. "Can he be seen?"

"Would you ask him now, Leolin!"

"Now. Before I leave the house. You must be my promised wife this day, love, if you would not be his."

They drew apart hurriedly, for voices broke on their ears, ominously near. Lady Essington and the dowager and the rest came in view, perhaps to see what the two young people might be doing. They saw Anna seated on a large flower-pot turned upside down, training the refractory branches of a rare plant with a refractory name that nobody yet ever succeeded in spelling, and the Lord of Pomeroy ungallantly standing with his back to her, lost in contemplation of the wonderful American aloe, which blossomed but once a century.

Lady Faulcot's sight was keen, and her imagination crafty. "You should have your eyes about you," cried she confidentially to the countess. "Anna is just at the age that she may get her head turned; and he does not want for attractions, that young Lord of Pomeroy."

"My dear dowager, Anna is safe. She marries St. Ives."

"Eh! what? Who says so?" ejaculated the dowager.

"He made his proposals for her to the earl yesterday. It is all settled."



"Mercy on the rest of the girls, then!" cried Lady Faulcot. "What will they do?—they are all rampant after St. Ives. Is it true that young Stanton has shot his head off?" continued she, passing further on between the beautiful green plants, and addressing Leolin Pomeroy.

"Not his head, madam. One of his ears and part of his hand."

"What incautious simpletons you young men are, to get toying with guns! I'd rather play with a wild hyena, for my part."

"There was a flaw in it," said Leolin. "Bishop——"

"I dare say, lord. That's sure to be the tale—Bishop, Bishop! He's always in fault; never your own careless awkwardness.—Anna we are to congratulate you, I hear. Take care, child, that you don't get a stray shot sent into yourself. When this news shall obtain wind, there are some would give you one, if they dared."

"What news?" asked Anna, innocently, not understanding the speaker's drift.

"That you have accepted St. Ives. All the girls were running after him, you know."

"That she should speak of it in this open manner—before her nieces, and before him!" mentally uttered the confused countess. "She talks of young men being simpletons! what's she, I'd like to ask?"

"Is the earl at home?" quietly demanded Leolin, of Lady Essington.

"I believe he is in his study. Do you want him?"

"I will go to his study," said he.

The dowager Lady Faulcot took her departure with



her train: but not before Anna had whispered a word to her that her congratulations were premature—of which the old lady believed as much as she chose. Not long after that, Anna heard the study bell ring, and the Lord of Pomeroy was shown out. Then came a message to Lady Essington: the earl wanted her in his study. Mabel and Geraldine followed their mother out of the room, but not to the study; and this left Anna alone.

She was alone when the next caller was shown in—the Duke of St. Ives. The young duke, seizing on the favourable opportunity, repeated in person the offer he had made to her father the previous night. Anna, very much distressed now that it had come to a point, refused him, kindly but firmly.

“This cannot be your final decision!” exclaimed the young man, displaying emotion.

“It is indeed.”

“But why have you suffered me to hope?”

“Nay,” said Lady Anna, “I have not suffered it: at least, not willingly. What have I done to encourage hope? How could I have acted otherwise than I have? You have been pleased to single me out, rather more perhaps than you have other girls, but I shrank from your attentions instead of——”

“It was that shrinking from me that won me,” interrupted the simple-hearted duke; “it was indeed.”

“I am very sorry: but I can’t see that I am to blame. I could not speak to you and say you must not court me, before you first spoke to me. I could not dare to assume that you were about to propose to me, without being sure of it.”



The duke allowed that: but he grew hot and somewhat incoherent in his disappointment.

"Lady Anna, can you not say that you—that you—will let it wait awhile, and think of it?"

"Oh no, I cannot; it must not wait a day. I can never say otherwise than I do now."

The duke nervously pulled his glove about. "I would try to make you so happy: I would not have a will but yours."

Anna was nervous also: it was her first essay at a refusal. She stammered out that he was very kind; very.

"I'm sure I thought you liked me."

"And I do like you, very much indeed," she impulsively answered, in the candour of her heart. "But not—not in that way. I like you very much better than any of the other young men we know. Except—except perhaps one or two," she lamely added, with a blush.

"I'm afraid you love some one else, Lady Anna."

The blush increased to crimson. Her face presented a picture of confusion.

"I see how it is," he whispered. "I have been indulging a foolish hope—and it had no foundation. I hope you will forgive me."

"We can be friends still," she answered earnestly, glancing almost appealingly at him through her glistening tears, for few natures were truer and tenderer than Anna Hetley's. "Please believe that I would not willingly have played with you."

"I do; I do believe you. It has been my fault—my mistake."

"If you had but just spoken one little word to me!



—but, as I say, I could not speak to you,” she timidly repeated, feeling, in her concern and sympathy, that she had been the unwitting cause of inflicting some cruel woe upon him. The duke prepared to leave.

“I shall never care for anyone else, Lady Anna.”

He nervously put out his hand, then drew it back, then put it out again. The young duke did not know what might be the etiquette on these occasions of rejection. Anna knew as little; but she frankly put her hand into his—and pressed it kindly: some vague idea running through her mind that it might soften the blow.

The duke sighed. “I think the next best thing to having you—will be to have your sister,” he observed, deliberating with himself. “If I cannot be your husband, it will be something to be your brother. I don’t love her, it’s true; but I shall never love anyone now.”

The candid avowal, and the rueful tone it was made in, changed the current of Anna’s feelings. She almost laughed.

“Oh, yes; that would be delightful, if you could only fancy one of them. Which of them do you mean, Mabel or Geraldine?”

“Well I don’t know,” said the duke; “I have not thought about it. I must talk to my mother. Good bye.”

Shaking her hand again, he quitted the room, and was out of the house quickly. Anna, inexpressibly relieved in more ways than one, hummed a merry waltz, and danced round and round the room.

Lady Essington had found her husband waiting for her in his study. A little man, wearing a black velvet



cap on the top of his head, and a flowery chintz dressing-gown: a merry-hearted little man, who liked to take things pleasantly.

"Did you send Pomeroy to me?" he asked.

"I told him you were here. Why?"

"Then you don't know what he wants?"

"How should I know? To talk about Stanton, perhaps."

"He wants Anna."

The countess questioned with her eyes and lips. "Wants her for what?"

"To be his wife."

"What a donkey he must be!" uttered the lady, irascibly. "Why, the old Dowager of Barham, old Faulcot, let it out to him that she was going to marry St. Ives!"

"But is she going to marry St. Ives?"

"What should hinder her?" retorted the countess.

"She may like somebody else better. The Lord of Pomeroy says she does."

"I wish the Lord of Pomeroy had been buried in the Pomeroy vaults before he had come upsetting things in this way!" was the intemperate rejoinder of Lady Essington. "There's not such a match in all England as St. Ives; if Anna were to let him slip I would never forgive her. Besides, she can't now: that prating old dowager is off to tell it to all London."

The earl laughed: he enjoyed the joke. "You and the dowager must settle it between you," said he. "I suppose, my lady, you told her first. But, if Anna has got the Lord of Pomeroy in her head, she can't marry St. Ives."



My lady scowled. "Would you let her marry Pomeroy, with St. Ives in the way?"

"I'd let her marry Pomeroy with St. Ives in the way, or out of it," returned the good-natured earl. "When young people take mutual likings, where is the use of standing out against them? Had there been anything objectionable in Pomeroy, any cause against his wooing her, why did you suffer them to meet? Here has he been in the house continually, like a tame cat. Not that I complain: I like the young fellow."

"I have allowed him to come in, like a tame cat, as you elegantly express it, because I was in hopes he would take a fancy to Geraldine," was the answer, sharply spoken. "I am sure it is to Geraldine he has mostly talked."

"When he has talked aloud," put in Lord Essington, with another laugh. "I always thought it was Anna, and so I tell you. They were for ever together when we were abroad: you know that, Lucinda. I saw them last night, whispering, and twirling about in that brainless dance, that's only good for making the head reel and the stomach sick."

"My daughters have been too properly reared to allow themselves to become attached where it is not expedient," said she loftily.

"But nature's nature," cried the earl.

"And training's training," retorted the countess. "What if they did see each other sometimes abroad?—he was nothing but a younger son then, and had no more thought of coming into the Pomeroy estates than I had."

"He says she loves him; and he says he ardently



loves her," was the only answer the earl gave to this. "I believe he does."

"Love!" rejoined my lady, scornfully. "Love must give place to expediency. Did he speak of the duke?"

"Yes, he did," replied the earl, his face in a glow of merriment. "He called him names; The bran' new Brummagem duke!"

Lady Essington's eyes flashed fire. "Shameful! How dared he?"

"Dared? Oh, come now! These old, old families, these long-pedigreed aristocrats (we are not very old ourselves, you know, Lucinda) do hold in contempt new people. In point of descent, the Duke of St. Ives is not worthy to buckle on the garter of the Lord of Pomeroy."

Lady Essington's tart rejoinder was stopped. She heard the duke's voice upon the stairs; and, opening the door, saw him passing along the hall. He was departing after his interview with Anna. Lady Essington hastened to accost him; but the duke, ever so far on then, looked back with a cold bow only, and was gone.

"She has been refusing him!" exclaimed the countess, sinking into a chair. "I'd lay all the money I am worth, that she has been refusing him. And I never knew he was here!—and that old Dame of Barham will have gone with her mouth open round the town! If Anna has been so great an idiot, I think I shall beat her!"

She bent her angry and hasty steps to the drawing-room, and caught my young Lady Anna in the midst of her waltz. Arresting her by the arm, she turned her round the other way; not very gently.



"What have you been doing to the Duke of St. Ives?"

"Mamma! how you startled me!"

"What have you been doing to the Duke of St. Ives?"

"Oh, please don't be angry!" implored Anna. "I only told the duke I could not marry him."

"You wicked girl! Not marry him! Not marry St. Ives! Mabel, come here," interrupted the countess, hearing Lady Mabel enter the next room; "look at your sister there! She has been refusing St. Ives."

"You have not?" debated Mabel, slowly, speaking to Anna. "You are not quite a fool, *au fond*."

"Such a fuss!" cried Anna, goaded into rebellion. "Who's St. Ives? Leolin Pomeroy calls him——"

"Be still, you shameless child!" interrupted the countess. "How dare you mention Pomeroy to my face?—after sending him to your papa with a tale that you had fallen in love with him, and he with you!"

Anna stood with blushing cheeks and fallen eyelids. They might read in her face that it was no fable, the love existing between her and Leolin.

"Mabel, he called St. Ives a bran' new Brummagem duke, or some such vulgarism; and—and——" my lady hardly knew whether to subside into a fit of hysterics, or to shake Anna—"your father takes his part; says he shall have her."

"He is the Lord of Pomeroy," observed Anna, in a low tone. "But for the Duke of St. Ives wanting me, mamma, you would never have thought of objecting to him."

"Right, child," exclaimed the earl, who had come in now and was ready to burst with suppressed



laughter. "I say if they had not wanted you to have young Pomeroy, he should not have been allowed to come here."

"Well, papa," cried Mabel, sharply, "I never thought you would have upheld Anna in such conduct."

"What conduct?" asked the earl.

"She has encouraged the duke shamefully; nobody else has had a chance with him; and I do say that to turn round upon him now is not good conduct. Last night that ever was, she went parading his bouquet in his rooms."

Lord Essington, for all his good nature, had as keen a sense of what was right and wrong as other people. His face wore a displeased look as he turned to Anna. She bit her lips to hide a smile.

"Two bouquets came for me, papa. The one was a beauty, and mamma ordered me to use it."

"But you had no right to use it," screamed the countess, "if you meant to reject the duke to-day."

"But it was not the duke's," returned Anna; "the duke's was the one we left at home."

"I speak of that beautiful bouquet," snapped my lady; "not of the inferior one you did not use."

"Yes, the bouquet that I took—that you told me to take," assented Anna, demurely. "It was the Lord of Pomeroy's."

A pause. They were taking in the sense of the words: of the treason.

"You little deceitful——" began her mother. But the earl burst into a hearty laugh, which drowned the rest of the reproach.

Leolin Pomeroy, unlike his brother George, had



lost no time in assuming his new honours, as head of his house. Resigning his diplomatic post at once, he hastened to London, made a flying visit to the abbey, and then went back to London again, all within a week. His attraction was the Lady Anna Hetley, whom he had met and seen a great deal of abroad. He had not dared to hope for her when he was one of the many nameless, obscure attachés: but he meant to have her now that he was Lord of Pomeroy.



## CHAPTER II.

Lady Anna.

"WHAT slur is it that lies on the Pomeroy escutcheon? I am almost sure there is one."

The question was put by Lady Geraldine; and her mother at once began to ransack her memory. She fancied she had heard of something disagreeable that happened in the family a few years ago. The Essingtons had not been intimate with the Pomeroy family: the eldest daughter, Lucy, had once, when staying with some people in the same county, been taken to the abbey on a short visit. Lucy was married now, and lived in Ireland. Last year, during a stay the Essingtons had made on the continent, they had seen a good deal of the young attaché. He was plain and poor Leolin Pomeroy then. He was the lord now: but it was most unreasonable of him to come after Anna when the Duke of St. Ives wanted her. Lady Essington was not a woman to give up her way or her will without a fight to keep it. She had set her heart upon marrying Anna to the duke, who could hardly count his riches, and she did not choose to be frustrated by the (comparatively speaking) poor Lord of Pomeroy. This suggestion of Geraldine's was, therefore, as welcome to her as gold; for, if there was a hole in the Pomeroy coat, it was clearly her duty to find it. Should it turn out to be a large one, she might make it a pretext for declining the alliance.



Down, on the spur of the moment, as soon as she had swallowed her luncheon, went Lady Essington to Lincoln's Inn, to the offices of that noted firm of solicitors, Hildyard and Prael. Rather to the annoyance, it must be owned, of her two elder daughters, who had hoped to secure the carriage for some expedition of their own. Mr. Hildyard chanced to be disengaged, and she was at once shown into his private room.

It was not the first conference that Lady Essington had held in that room: a small compartment softly carpeted, with a large light window, and walls that seemed to be made of deed boxes. Her husband had a vast deal of trouble with their only son, the spendthrift Viscount Cardine, necessitating many consultations and much arrangement with the lawyers, and her ladyship liked to have, herself, a finger in the pie. Mr. Hildyard was one of the wealthiest, most upright, and renowned solicitors in London: quite a gentleman of the old school, and a Roman Catholic. As a matter of course his practice lay chiefly with those who held the same faith, amidst whom were the Essingtons and the Pomeroyes.

As Lady Essington entered, he rose from his seat: an elderly, neat, silent man, dressed in black with a white shirt frill—a mode of attire not unusual for lawyers in those days. His face was fair, his light eyes were calm, and on the top of his head, getting bald now, lay a sprinkling of powder.

“Well, and what can I do for you to-day?” he asked, when greetings had passed and he had placed Lady Essington in a seat and resumed his own at



his table. "Any fresh complication arisen for Lord Cardine?"

"No, no, nothing of that," she impatiently interrupted, waving her hand as if she would wave away the subject his question touched upon, and the trouble it invariably suggested. "I am come to ask what you know of the Pomeroy's of Pomeroy."

Mr. Hildyard did not immediately answer. He sat, as he often did sit, with his right hand inside his waistcoat, lying across the cambric frill of his shirt.

"I think there is some blot on their escutcheon," she continued. "I want to know what it is."

"There is no blot on their escutcheon, to my knowledge, Lady Essington," spoke Mr. Hildyard now. "Unless you allude to the fatal quarrel which took place between the lord and his brother Rupert, resulting in the former's death."

"*That's* it," spoke Lady Essington quickly. "I remember now—and how disgracefully the young wife was mixed up with it. One brother killed the other."

"Yes, they quarrelled, and—and there was a fatal struggle. The lord——"

"I wish you would relate the particulars."

Mr. Hildyard entered upon the recital—giving the heads of the story briefly. He cast no blame on anyone: lawyers are cautious: not even upon the young Lady of Pomeroy. But Lady Essington, her memory thus refreshed, was recalling this bit and the other bit, as they recurred to her. The lord's wife was said to favour his handsome brother Rupert, and a mortal quarrel took place; a mortal scuffle, in which the elder was killed: she remembered that much now. Mr. Hildyard assented. Yes, he said, a pistol went off



and it shot the lord; and Rupert had made good his escape. It was evident to Lady Essington that the lawyer spoke very unwillingly indeed: and but for her own shrewd questions she would have learnt next to nothing.

"The late lord, George, never came home to enter on his inheritance," observed Mr. Hildyard, passing from the quarrel to a more legitimate portion of the subject. "He would have come shortly, had he not died—as I have reason to know from his letters to me."

"Yes, he died," assented Lady Essington: "and that brought the attaché, Leolin, Lord of Pomeroy. Well now, should you not consider that that fatal quarrel reflects a lasting disgrace on Leolin Pomeroy?"

"Certainly not," said Mr. Hildyard, more warmly than he generally spoke. "Leolin Pomeroy stands as pure from disgrace, in my opinion, as poor Guy stood when he succeeded his father. It would be a cruel thing, my lady, if one brother must be held responsible for the ill-doing of another. That is a creed which I hope will never obtain amidst Englishmen."

"I didn't say he was to be held responsible; I said the matter reflected disgrace on him," retorted my lady. "And so it does."

"And so it does not—as I think all just men would say. Pardon me, Lady Essington: you asked my opinion, and I but give it. Leolin Pomeroy stands as high as a young man of noble character can stand."

"He has shown himself a very deceitful man in my house; I can tell you that. Downright wicked."

Mr. Hildyard opened his eyes. "Deceitful? wicked?"



"Why yes: he has come and made love, under the rose, to my daughter Anna. He wants to marry her."

A smile crossed the lawyer's lips. "I see," he observed. "That is his offence, is it, countess. And—pardon me—why should he not marry Lady Anna?"

"Because I wish her to marry somebody else."

"It is a good position—that of Lady of Pomeroy; and the rent-roll is now free. A position not to be altogether despised by even one of your daughters, Lady Essington."

"But he has fixed upon the wrong daughter, don't you see: Anna might be Duchess of St. Ives to-morrow. Pomeroy might have had either of the other two, and welcome."

"And what does Lady Anna say?"

"Say—ungrateful little monkey!—says she'll have Pomeroy and not St. Ives. Her father upholds her."

"Oh," responded Mr. Hildyard. "Well, I don't know much of the duke, but he seems to me rather an empty-headed young fellow. I should prefer Leolin Pomeroy myself."

"Why you are as bad as the earl! What did he say to my face this morning, that husband of mine?—that the duke was not fit to buckle on the garters of the Lord of Pomeroy."

"He spoke of their descent, I assume," observed Mr. Hildyard shrewdly. "Good descent goes for something, madam."

"I would rather have money," retorted she, candidly. "But I suppose it is of no use my taking up your time any longer."

The lawyer rose. "I do assure you, Lady Essing-



ton, that I know nothing against the honour of Leolin Pomeroy. Or against that of the Pomeroy family, if we except that fatal quarrel."

But Lady Essington, as she drove back to Berkeley Square, still thought there *was* something else, though she was unable to recal what. The probability was, that rumours of that old tale, touching the "wicked lord," had at some time or other reached her ears and might be floating indistinctly in her brain.

"You might have spared yourself the visit, mamma," were the words Geraldine accosted her with as she entered. "Old Mrs. Knox has been here and told us all about it. The late Lord of Pomeroy killed his brother."

"The brother killed the late lord," corrected Lady Essington. "And we must all have short memories to forget it. It was done in a scuffle."

"Mrs. Knox called it murder."

"A scuffle—that's what old Hildyard called it. But he is as close as wax. It was not the late lord, however, Geraldine. That was George, who has recently died, and who never came home at all."

"It was Guy: the one that Lucy knew: and what a creature that wife of his must have been! Mrs. Knox says the inquest brought it in wilful murder, and the brother who did it is being looked for still. Anyway, whether killing or murder, it was altogether disreputable."

"Most disreputable," warmly assented Lady Essington. "Where's Anna?"

"Papa called her down to the study," crossly answered Geraldine, who was often in a temper the reverse of amiable, and was especially so to-day. She had had



private hopes herself of the new Lord of Pomeroy: and now he had cast upon her the unpardonable slight of passing her over for her younger sister.

The countess hastened to the study to see what treason might be hatching. Once that simple husband of hers, who had as little notion of the social proprieties of life as an owl, and that simple Anna, who had less, got plotting together without herself to keep them in order, there was no guessing at the result.

"Anna, are your affections fixed upon Leolin Pomeroy?" began the earl, in his simple, straightforward way, when he had called her down to his study and closed the door.

Anna's cheeks grew crimson. She turned to the window, which had an agreeable view of a small back yard, to screen them.

"Or upon the Duke of St. Ives?"

She glanced up at him now. "Oh, papa, no! I don't care for the duke. I only like him as a friend; I could not be his wife. And—and——"

"And what? Speak freely, my dear. This is a solemn subject."

"I thought also that a union with the duke would not be quite suitable for me. We are not of the same faith."

"True. But so many intermarriages take place now that—at any rate, your mother sees no objection. We will let that question be. I only wish to give you a word of advice, Anna: before deciding irrevocably, make sure that you know your own mind. The young men are both desirable; I like them much. Pomeroy has the advantage in lineage, St. Ives in money: not but that, in my opinion, Pomeroy is quite rich enough.



The wife of the Duke of St. Ives, let him marry whom he may, will be mistress and master; he will make a docile, obedient, kind husband. The Lords of Pomeroy, on the contrary, have the reputation of liking to rule their wives with an imperative will."

Tears stood in her eyes as she looked up beseechingly. "Papa, I could not respect or love a man who would yield his will to mine in great things. I must be able to reverence my husband, to find him one that I can obey: and I am certain that Leolin will ever love me and be indulgent to me."

"Be it so, then," said the earl, as he kissed her forehead. "Long life and happiness to you, Lady of Pomeroy!"

It was at this critical juncture that Lady Essington interrupted them, her bonnet on, her shawl not unfastened, just as she had come in from Mr. Hildyard's. When she found that her husband had weakly given his promise to Anna, her indignation was unbounded.

"Why you must be a born natural, Lord Essington! Think of the duke's money!"

"Money! Oh, ah, he has a good deal of that. More money than brains." And my young Lady Anna, being so far wanting in reverence as to laugh, her mother, tapped her arm sharply.

"I have a great mind to shake you, you undutiful child. Who is he, that Leolin Pomeroy, beside the Duke of St. Ives? The other day he was but a miserable underling."

"But, mamma, he is Lord of Pomeroy now."

"Lord of fiddlestick! Have you reflected what it is to be a duchess, and to be richer than nearly every other woman in London?"



"I should not know what to do with the riches," said Anna, simply. "Besides, the duke is not of our faith."

"What of that? He would not interfere with your faith, or you with his. I daresay you might have the honour of converting him in the first twelvemonth."

"I should not try to convert him," said Anna.

"Not try?"

"No. I am not clever enough for that. And I think good people like to keep to the faith in which they have been reared—if they do their duty in it."

"Oh, indeed!" spoke the countess, sarcastically, while the earl nodded approval at Anna. "How highly ridiculous you are! You could let his faith alone if you chose."

"But I should not like it at all," pleaded Anna. "I should not like for my husband to worship in one church, and I in another."

She seemed quite excited; her fingers were interlaced, tears were streaming down. Lord Essington fondly laid his hand upon her head to reassure her.

"And indeed, mamma, for these reasons and others, I *cannot* marry the Duke of St. Ives. Papa has been so kind as to say that he does not object to the Lord of Pomeroy: if you object, why I must remain unmarried. I could never have anyone but Leolin."

"There, there; don't fret," said the earl, soothingly. "I've said it, and I'll stick to it. Leolin Pomeroy is quite rich enough for you and for me, Anna; and your mother would have thought him so, but for St. Ives. You be off upstairs, my dear, and tell Pomeroy I say so. That's he, now gone up, I fancy: I told him he might call for his answer this afternoon."



"*You* have done a pretty thing!" snapped my lady, as Anna escaped. "Letting the best match in the world go out of the family!"

"One can't be always wise," smiled the earl, good-humouredly. "I am not going to have my children made unhappy for all the matches in christendom."

"You'd rather see them old maids. I know that."

"I don't know but I'd as soon see them old maids, as not," he avowed. "Marriage is all a lottery. But that's not the present question. I don't myself understand how Anna is to be an old maid if she marries Leolin Pomeroy."

"You always were aggravating, you know, Essington."

"I really don't know it: I did not think I was," he answered, still smiling. "I confess, looking at the matter with my eyes, the Lord of Pomeroy seems to be an exceedingly suitable match, ay, and a good match, for any of the girls. I say you would have thought so yourself, Lucinda, but for getting young St. Ives on your brain."

"I have not got St. Ives on my brain."

"No? Well, it looks like it."

"But for me, Essington, the girls might go altogether to the dogs. Look at Lucy. Because she fell in love with that foolish fellow, Captain Blake, and he with her, you must needs go and let them marry! Of course she has been buried alive ever since at that bog-hole of a place of his, in Ireland, living no doubt upon potatoes."

Lord Essington's face lighted up with mirth. "It is a very pretty place," he said. "I would ask nothing better than to live there myself; and Blake's a good



fellow, and Lucy is as happy as the day's long. And his six thousand a year will buy them something better than potatoes, I take it."

"Do you *really* mean to let her have him?"

"Have whom—Blake? Why she has had him these four years."

"There! Do you aggravate me, or don't you? You know I meant Anna."

"Oh, Anna! I'm sure I thought you were speaking of Lucy. Well, yes; there's no help for it—and I expect she has told Pomeroy so by this time. It is not my fault; I did not choose him: you must acknowledge that, Lucinda."

"They chose one another, it seems," snapped the countess.

"Quite so. And you, by letting them be always together, winked at it. Pardon the word."

"But I thought he came for Geraldine," said poor, mistaken Lady Essington, with something very like a sob. "At least, we hoped it. St. Ives was after Anna, and who was to suspect that Pomeroy would interfere with *him*? I should have been the envy of every house in London had we secured St. Ives."

The earl laughed. To his unsophisticated nature, these anglings after settlements, so rife in the great world, were a source of both wonder and amusement.

"I saw Winchester in the clerks' office as I came out; waiting to see Hildyard, I suppose," remarked Lady Essington, as she related her visit to the lawyer's and enlarged upon the "slur" that lay on the Pomeroy's. "He must be in a mess again."

"Hildyard is not their man of business."

"Perhaps their own man won't have anything more



to do with Winchester; he may be trying to get Hildyard to take him up," said the countess. "A fine time Lord Sones must have of it!"

"Ay," assented her husband, suppressing a sigh. Other fathers had "fine times" with their sons as well as the Earl Sones.

Meanwhile, Anna, escaping to her own room, effaced the marks of tears from her face and then went to the drawing-room. Leolin, waiting alone, uneasy, full of suspense, turned when the door opened. She shut it, and halted there. He walked towards her: his face grave, his voice low, his hand outstretched.

"How is it to be, Anna?" he began, with some emotion. "Your father would not give me any answer this morning; he said I must come again."

But the tender light in her blue eyes, the soft blushes that came and went, told him enough. With a faint cry of pleasure, he caught her to him.

"My darling, I see it! You are to be mine?"

"Papa has left it to me, Leolin."

"And then—and then—my darling will leave it to me. And I say she must be mine without any unnecessary loss of time."

"Oh, but not yet, Leolin."

"Not yet! Why?" he asked, taking a chair near her.

"Oh, I don't know. It is only just settled—only to-day."

"But it is a great many to-days that we have loved each other. Ah, Anna, what should we have done had I remained a poor attaché? What might be in your mind I did not presume to ask then; but I know



that I was troubled and tormented beyond measure, fearing that, poor as I was, and with no position, I might not presume to ask for you. Now and again it has crossed my mind to go out to India and beg my good-natured brother George to give me an income. I think he would have done it."

"Was he very good-natured?"

"Very. Few natures are so generously good as was that of George Pomeroy. He was the least selfish man I ever knew. He was not married, you know, had no children to provide for; and, I do believe, had I gone to him and told him about you, that he would have made things easy for us. What of the duke?"

"I saw him after you left. I told him how impossible it was that I should accept him—and Leolin, I did say that I had longed to give him a hint before, only that of course I could not. He was very kind when he fully understood how it was; and I said I hoped we should always be good friends."

"To be sure. We will invite him down to Pomeroy. I like St. Ives myself, and——What a lovely child!"

A little fairy, arrayed in white, with delicate features, large, lustrous eyes of light brown, and silky curls, was peeping into the room. Lady Anna held out her hand.

"Come in, Annaline."

The child advanced, modestly and timidly. Leolin drew her towards him.

"What a gentle little thing! what a sweet expression!" he said aside to Anna. "Who is she?"

"Tell your name to this gentleman, my dear," said Anna.



"Annaline Hetley," lisped the child.

"Annaline, does she say?" repeated Leolin. "I never heard the name before. It is a pretty one."

"I think so, too; prettier than Anna."

"Ah, no; not prettier than Anna. Anna is the nicest name in the world."

"She is the little daughter of Captain Hetley: his father was papa's first cousin. Frank is a great favourite of papa's," added Anna, changing her language to French, and speaking freely in her open nature, "and he deserves to be so. But he is very poor, and he was sadly improvident in marrying early."

"As improvident, I suppose, as I should have been called had I married you when I had nothing to marry upon," laughed Leolin.

"That is just poor Frank's case," she said, her eyes lighting up. "I don't think he has much besides his pay. He fell in love with the daughter of a brother officer, and married her."

"She was poor, also, I suppose?"

"Of course. And she was of no family, therefore I am sorry to say that all our family despise her, except papa, and treat her rather cavalierly. But oh, Leolin, she is one of the best, and most refined, and nicest of women. If anyone ever had a treasure in a wife, it is Frank. Papa fears, though, he will have to sell out."

"Have you a doll, little one?" asked Leolin, returning to his English again.

"No," said the child, "I gave it to Franky when he was ill. There was a dreat big one in a shop, but mamma said it was too dear."



"No doll! What do you do all day?"

"I play with Franky; and when mamma has the headache I help her."

"Help her, you little woman! How do you help her?"

"I sit on the carpet and watch her, and ring the bell when she tells me; and sometimes she let me nurse the baby on my lap. Mamma says I am her dear little help-mate."

Leolin laughed. "How old are you?"

"I am four, and Franky is five, and Mary is two, and baby is free monfs. She tan't talk."

"I think I must buy you a great big doll. What would you do with it?"

"I should let Franky nurse it. Franky's ill."

"But Franky has your old one."

"No; he 'queezed it and the b'an fell out."

"Then I think we must get one for you and one for Franky," concluded Leolin, his eyes fixed on the little up-turned face, that seemed, somehow, older than its years.

Before the day was over, Lady Essington had come round, so far as to be gracious to Leolin. The fact truly was, that she would have found no fault with the alliance of the Lord of Pomeroy—nay, would have rejoiced proudly in it—had not the duke, with his riches and his grand title, inopportunately stepped in. The Lord of Pomeroy was rich, but the Duke of St. Ives was more rich: and the more we have, you know, the more we covet.

"Did Guy Pomeroy leave any children?" enquired Lady Geraldine that evening of her mother, when the family sat alone.



"A girl. No heir."

"I should not care to go to a home already occupied," continued she, for she had not got over her resentment. "I hear the widow lives there: and a nice woman she must be!"

"She is welcome to live there," interposed Anna, her sweet voice a very panacea for all ills of temper. "The abbey is large enough for more than one household."

"When Anna becomes Lady of Pomeroy, the widow will subside into her proper place," spoke Lady Essington.

"It is usual for the widows of the Lords of Pomeroy to have their own apartments at the abbey," observed Anna. "Leolin has told me a great deal about the Pomeroy customs."

"Oh, the Pomeroy's own to all sorts of old customs and traditions, and they think they must obey them: Mrs. Knox was saying so to-day," returned Geraldine. "They were always a peculiar and a superstitious race."



## CHAPTER III.

## Guy's Child.

ONCE more, as in the days gone by, Pomeroy Abbey was raising its proud head, conscious of the presence of its lord. Leolin had come down to see that things should be in suitable readiness for his bride. Six years now, and no lord had been there.

Since the death of Guy, his widow had lived in that part of the abbey which stood between the gateway and the south tower. Leolin, wishing to show courtesy to her as his brother's widow (though he never would be able to show her cordiality), decided to leave her in it undisturbed. He would reside in the other part of the front portion, and in the north wing, which adjoined it. How Mrs. Pomeroy would like to be deposed from her state and authority as Lady of Pomeroy—for no other had supplanted her—was another question. She lived a retired life. Stories had gone about to her prejudice at the time of Guy's death, but time had softened down the feeling against her, and formal visits were paid her. The ardent longing for personal homage and for gaiety, which had been amid her besetting sins, seemed entirely to have left her. That fatal night had turned the current of her life. She was now reserved, cold, proud; and had become, as the French happily term it, a *dévôte*. Yet how young she was still—wanting yet some few years of thirty.



Mrs. Pomeroy had not been entirely without suitors during these six years. Perhaps we ought to say would-be suitors, for only one had ventured to bring matters to a climax. That was Charles Knox, of the Knoll: a man of good property, and a relative of old Mrs. Knox, who knew the Essingtons. Whether it was Alice Pomeroy's fortune, or her beauty, or her position, that made the attraction, certain it was that several men desired to marry her. Mr. Knox was the first to try his fate; and he received his answer—an answer which surprised him. Had he presented himself to Mrs. Pomeroy with a proposition to poison her, he could not have been met with greater indignation. She looked ready to strike him—"and, egad, I thought she'd have done it," he said later, when telling the tale to a friend. Mrs. Pomeroy ordered him out of the abbey and the doors to be closed against him, after telling him that his proposal was an insult and himself a madman for making it, and asking him, with an intensity of scorn that has rarely been heard in the human voice, whether he supposed she would marry *him* after having been the wife of the Lord of Pomeroy. The report of this got wind somehow; it served to deter other aspirants, and Mrs. Pomeroy was left unmolested.

In the business room below, which had shelves and account books and tin boxes and desks in it, and which adjoined another and larger business room that was called the audience chamber, sat the new Lord of Pomeroy, and Gaunt, the ex-gentleman-keeper. For Gaunt was not the keeper now. He had given up that post when he took upon himself the control of the property, in compliance with the wishes of the late lord, George.



John Gaunt, looking noble as ever, but sadly worn and thin, sat before the large desk, which he always used. It was in fact the lord's desk—when any reigning lord chose to meddle with his own affairs and keep his own accounts. Leolin had drawn a chair near. They were going over the receipts and expenditure of the last six years; the years that had elapsed since Guy died and George succeeded. Leolin, lord now, thought he had a right to inquire into these items; and Gaunt, courteous ever, afforded him all the information he asked for.

"How well the estate has righted itself," observed Leolin in grateful admiration. "You have been an excellent manager."

"I have done my best," replied Gaunt.

"And were all the net revenues, except the portion paid to Mrs. Pomeroy, transmitted to my brother George?"

"Yes. All."

"You transmitted them yourself?"

"No: I have paid them over to Mr. Hildyard. It was he who transmitted them to your brother."

"I wonder what George did with the money?" cried Leolin musingly, leaning back in his chair and thrusting his hands into his coat pockets. "He could not spend it; it's not likely he would, out there. I hope he has left a will!"

"Oh yes, he is sure to have done that."

"Not at all sure, Gaunt. George was always careless in money matters—thinking of all the world before himself. And his death was unexpected, remember. If he has not left a will, who—I wonder—would come in for the money?"



"His wife and child," spoke Gaunt, who seemed just then to have gone into a reverie on his own score.

"Wife and child! You are dreaming, Gaunt," laughed Leolin. "Were you thinking of poor Guy?"

"Perhaps I was," said Gaunt, rousing himself, and plunging into the books again.

"I should have a share, I suppose; and Joan would, and Isabel; and—would *she*?"

"Who, sir?"

"Mrs. Pomeroy."

"I should fancy not."

"I suppose the servants have behaved well, Gaunt?"

"Very well indeed. They have not had too much to do," added Gaunt, with a smile.

Leolin threw back his head. "No, indeed! The whole lot of them basking in idleness here, just because they were George's servants, while I had to work like a horse over yonder. It's fine to be the Lord of Pomeroy!"

Gaunt answered nothing. His head was bent over his figures again. In half an hour their task was finished, and Gaunt rose, after locking up the desk.

"Then, in a week's time we shall see you here again," he casually remarked to Leolin; who was returning to London on the morrow.

"In a week's time you will see me here again, all being well, and my wife with me. And then," added Leolin, "I shall ask you to resign your trusteeship, Gaunt, and give you many thanks for your faithful stewardship. I mean to go in for work myself."

"I should like to keep it on a little longer," said Gaunt quietly.

"Why?"



"It may be better that I should."

"You are not ready with the accounts, I suppose?"

"Ready at any moment, as far as the accounts go," replied Gaunt. "But—I am not quite ready on other scores."

They stood looking at one another. Gaunt calm, noble, towering in his great height nearly a head above Leolin, who was himself but of middle height. Leolin thought Gaunt's manner rather peculiar; and he was suddenly struck with his look of sickness.

"Are you not well, Gaunt?"

"Not very."

"You are frightfully thin. Why don't you speak to Norris?"

"Oh, I don't think it is anything serious," was the careless answer.

"How do you do this morning, Uncle Leolin?" demanded a young lady of some six years old, who came darting into the room. It was Mary Pomeroy, Guy's child. She was very nice looking; with the large grey Pomeroy eyes, and pretty, well-formed features. Her complexion was of that rather dark (or yellow) tinge that sometimes accompanies grey eyes, and the colour on her cheeks was more like vermillion than rose. She carried her little proud head upright, her fair curls falling back on her neck, and walked with the air of a queen.

"Is it you, Mary? Come and give me a kiss."

"I shall not, Uncle Leolin," was the defiant answer.

"No! And why?"

"Because you turned me out of the garden yesterday. You made Bridget take me in-doors."



"But it rained. You were getting wet—and you had thin shoes on."

"They were my dancing shoes: I had been taking my lesson. But I'll not kiss you, Uncle Leolin. I like the rain; and I always have my own way when you are not here."

"Do you! Then it is as well that I should be here, Miss Mary."

"Do you know that old Jerome is outside in the corridor? He is waiting to see you."

"Is he?" cried Leolin quickly. "Tell him to come in, there's a little fairy."

"You may tell him yourself, Uncle Leolin. If you are not good to me, I shall not be good to you."

Anything more sturdily commanding than the air of this little lady, as she stood, still and resolute, was never seen. She had inherited the stern, indomitable spirit of her father, and she had been the indulged plaything of the Abbey—in fact, its little mistress—so that all the obstinate will of the spirit had been fostered, not repressed. A daring child was Mary Pome-roy; and she had one of those remarkably sensible, precocious minds that are sometimes looked upon with awe. She would say things more suitable for a girl of sixteen than one of six. Leolin laughed; and Gaunt, who was departing, sent in Jerome.

"How is it you have not been to see me before, Jerome?" asked Leolin, shaking hands with the old man. "I have been here these three days."

Jerome made the best of his excuse. 'Twas only yesterday he heard that Mr. Leolin had arrived.

"Well, I went to the keep yesterday to see you, Jerome, as you did not come to see me, and I could



not get in," said Leolin. "I rang three or four times at that tinkling old bell of yours, which must have been cast in the year One."

"I ask your pardon, sir. I must have stepped out."

"You must be fine and lonely in that silent keep, Jerome! Will you come back to the abbey?"

"Many thanks, Mr. Leolin, but I could not," returned the old man, with almost trembling eagerness. "I'm used to my keep now, sir, and I could not leave it again."

"As you will. Look here, Jerome—is Gaunt a little touched?"

"A little what, sir?"

"Touched in the head," explained Leolin, tapping his forehead. Jerome looked surprised.

"Why, Mr. Leolin, he has got one of the strongest of heads, Gaunt has."

"His manner was certainly queer this morning, and he looks very ill. When I told him I should take the accounts into my own hands, thanking him for his faithful stewardship, he intimated that he could not give them up. The accounts were ready, he said, but he was not."

"Anything that Gaunt says, he must have his good reasons for; be sure of that, Mr. Leolin."

"I like Gaunt," struck in Mary Pomeroy, in her defiant tone, as if it behoved her to take up his championship. "He is kinder than you, Uncle Leolin. When I was little, he made me a present of a beautiful grey donkey, and taught me to ride."

Leolin laughed as he took the young lady's hand. "I am going to pay a visit to your mother: will you



conduct me?" said he playfully. And Miss Mary was pleased to do it, and walked up the grand staircase full of importance. She liked patronage of all kinds.

Mrs. Pomeroy was seated in the sombre oak chamber, which faced the quadrangle. Handsome though its carved paneling was, it looked dull and dark. Only herself could know what her feelings were, as she gazed on that fatal west tower that faced her, what her repentance was for the foolish part she had played.

Some fine work of silken embroidery was in her hand, which she put down as Leolin entered. She wore rich black silk; on her bright hair some black lace rested and fell behind, somewhat after the fashion of the lace veil worn by a Spanish woman. It was Mrs. Pomeroy's usual custom to wear this now. Her mother sometimes scolded her for making herself "into an old woman," but she adhered to it.

How thin she was—thin, and worn, and anxious looking! but her face retained its old beauty, and a soft bright colour flushed her cheeks as she rose to greet the Lord of Pomeroy. Leolin had paid her one formal visit on his arrival; he was now paying her a second, preparatory to his departure.

"I must thank you for allowing me to retain these rooms," she said—and there was a harshness in her tones, as there always had been, which grated on the refined ear of Leolin, who liked a low sweet voice, that "most excellent thing in woman." "I believe that I ought, according to former custom, to have removed into the south wing: but I have grown to love these rooms and should have been sorry to quit them. I thank you, Lord of Pomeroy, for your courtesy."

"I am pleased that you should retain them: I



should not think of wishing you to quit them," spoke Leolin in his natural good feeling. He did not like Mrs. Pomeroy: but she was his brother's widow, and he accorded to her personal deference.

"And I hope," he continued, "that you and my wife, Lady Anna, will be good friends. I am sure you will like her."

"I shall be glad to make Lady Anna's acquaintance," replied Mrs. Pomeroy coldly. And she took up her work again.

Conversation flagged. Leolin had to make it; she answered him by monosyllables, apparently without interest. He rose to terminate his visit.

"Oh, I forgot to ask you one thing," she interposed. "Have you heard any further particulars of your brother George's death?"

"No more than we heard at first," he answered—"that poor George died in action. He went forth in the morning, bright, and well, and in high spirits; and at night he was lying dead in a tent on the battlefield."

"It was very sad," sighed Mrs. Pomeroy.

"His confidential servant, Moore, is on his way home, I believe. He will bring the details, with George's personal effects and papers. We thought Moore would have landed ere this," added Leolin, as he formally shook hands with Mrs. Pomeroy, and quitted the room. Mary was in the corridor with her skipping-rope.

"Did mamma tell you I was naughty, Uncle Leolin?"

"Well—I daresay she might have told me, had I asked her if you were."



"I would not do my lessons this morning. Miss Lorne has the toothache; and mamma wanted to hear them instead, and I ran away. But I don't call that being *very* naughty, Uncle Leolin."

The old Abbey of Pomeroy stood out, its walls grey and gloomy in the dim twilight of the August evening. Its windows, however, were in contrast to the walls, many of them being as gay as light could make them, and its retainers bustled about in their preparations; for Leolin, Lord of Pomeroy, was bringing home his bride.

The marriage had taken place in London the previous day. Leolin would fain have reached the abbey the same night; but it was too far, so they made a halt on the road. Now, in the twilight of the second day, they were nearing it; and Lady Anna leaned forward in the carriage to look for the first time upon her future home. The huge pile rose, high and mighty, in front of her.

"What a large place, Leolin!"

"It is, my dearest."

"And there is a real ghost that haunts it, they say."

Leolin laughed. "I fear the ghost has been dead and gone this many a year: however disappointing it may be to your love of romance."

"Which are Mrs. Pomeroy's rooms?"

"Those to the right of the entrance, facing us. The reigning lord has always occupied the whole of the front, but I would not turn Mrs. Pomeroy out. We shall occupy the rooms on this side the entrance and the north wing which adjoins it."



"It must take an army of servants to keep it up; only this front pile is immense. Will there be two households, Leolin? Our own and Mrs. Pomeroy's?"

"Certainly. We shall have nothing to do with Mrs. Pomeroy, or she with us: she has her own servants and household, and we have ours. You and she need not meet once in a twelvemonth, unless you both please."

"But, Leolin, I think it will be delightful to meet: I am glad she is there. What sort of a person is she? Young?"

"Seven or eight-and-twenty, I fancy, and beautiful yet. I have only known her lately, have seen her but three times in all; but she strikes me as being the very saddest being I ever came across—proud, reserved, and sorrowful; and they say that formerly, previous to that shocking catastrophe, she was all life and merriment. She moves about with a softened footstep, sees little, if any, society, and seems to take no interest in life, scarcely even in her child, though I believe she is passionately fond of her."

The carriage rolled in at the large gateway, and drew up at the entrance—that on the right hand. The servants stood within the hall on either side, bowing to their lord and their new lady. Old Jerome had come from the keep to take his place at their head. Lady Anna spoke a few timid words to them: but there was true kindness in her tone, a sweet gentleness in her face and manner: and the servants knew at once that their future mistress was one to be loved.

Lady Anna was pleased with all she saw. The rooms were so numerous it would take her a week to know her way about them, she laughingly said. Some



of them had been decorated for her, under John Gaunt's superintendence; modernised, he called it; and were of almost regal splendour; but the greater portion remained quaint, sombre, and ancient.

"Do you think you shall be happy?" whispered Leolin, as he went to her dressing-room to take her away for dinner. "Do you regret St. Ives?"

Regret? A husband she loved, and this princely home, compared with what might have been—the simple Duke of St. Ives and his domineering mother!—she clasped her hands as she dwelt on the suggested contrast.

In the morning Leolin showed her over their own portion of the abbey, telling her this and that of the past history of the Pomeroyes. Anna was deeply interested in all she heard, and especially in the tale of the nun's picture and the prediction. That inveterate gossip, old Mrs. Knox, had given Anna her version of it in London, but she heard the truth now. Leolin, at least, was not superstitious; contact with the world had rubbed childish impressions out of him; but Anna had rather a love for the marvellous.

The afternoon was passing when they strolled into the garden—the large enclosure of land stretching out at the north side of the abbey. Gaunt had taken care that it should be well kept up.

"I could lose myself here as well as in the abbey, Leolin. What sheltering trees—what beautiful flowers—what winding walks and shady dells! But—Leolin—who is that?"

Leolin followed the direction of her eyes, and saw a lady who had just come into view round the bend by the cascade, a child by her side.



"That is Mrs. Pomeroy, Anna. I will bring her here and introduce you to one another."

But Mrs. Pomeroy, the instant she caught sight of them, had turned sharply away towards the shrubbery, which would take her to the egress gate; catching up the child's hand as she went. Miss Mary drew her hand away again and set off to run to Leolin.

"Mary, stay here," quickly exclaimed Mrs. Pomeroy.

"It is Uncle Leolin, mamma. I am going to him."

"But I tell you to stay here."

"And I tell you I must go to him," replied Miss Mary, exercising as usual her own indomitable will. And she continued her way to Leolin in defiance of her mother.

"Have you come back to the abbey, Uncle Leolin?"

"Yes," answered he, stooping to kiss her. "Go and speak to that lady, Mary."

"Who is she?" returned the child.

"She is the Lady of Pomeroy."

Leaving Mary, and walking forward quickly, he overtook Mrs. Pomeroy. She coldly shook him by the hand.

"My wife is there," he said. "Will you come now, and be introduced to her?"

"Would it be agreeable?"

"Oh, yes; she wishes to make your acquaintance. We got home last night; as I daresay you heard."

Meanwhile Mary had drawn towards Lady Anna, with a slow but fearless step, her grey eyes—the keen Pomeroy eyes—scanning her closely. Anna held out her hand that she might come quicker; but the child, instead of responding to the implied welcome, halted at a few yards' distance.



"What's your name?" boldly inquired she, with all the haughtiness of a Pomeroy.

"Lady Anna."

"My Uncle Leolin says you are the Lady of Pomeroy."

"I believe I am," smiled Anna.

"You are not. Mamma is the Lady of Pomeroy. Why do you tell a story?"

Anna felt amused. "We will not dispute about it, my dear. Tell me your name."

"Mary Alice Joan Pomeroy. My papa was Guy, Lord of Pomeroy. Uncle Leolin's the lord now."

"Yes, I know he is."

"And mamma's the lady," she repeated, defiantly. "Were you ever at the abbey before?"

"No."

"That's the east tower, and that's the north tower," said the child, doing the honours gravely of her paternal home. "And that queer place, over yonder, is the keep. Jerome lives in it."

Anna looked in the direction of the keep, and saw a round structure of grey stone, covered with moss like the abbey, a small narrow window here and there discernible.

"Who is Jerome?" asked she. "Stay—I remember. I saw him last night."

"Jerome was the confidential attendant on the Lords of Pomeroy. Do you know what that means?"

"Yes," laughed Anna.

"He was my grandpapa's attendant: and when grandpapa died, he became papa's; and when papa died, he would not stay in the abbey any longer, but went to the keep. I was a baby then, but Bridget tells me about it. I go to see Jerome sometimes."



"The keep belongs to the abbey then; to the Lords of Pomeroy?" continued Anna, thinking her a singularly intelligent child for her age.

"It belongs to them, of course. It was my Uncle George's while he lived, and now it is Uncle Leolin's. Did you know that Uncle George never came home, though he was the lord?"

"I have heard so."

"But the keep is Jerome's to live in for his life: the old lord gave it him when he was dying. That was my grandpapa: we call him the old lord."

"Who has made you so wise—and told you all this?"

"They all tell me. Bridget tells me, and Jerome tells me, and Aunt Joan tells me when she comes here, and Mr. Gaunt tells me. Gaunt used to be the gentleman-game-keeper. The men under him were the real keepers, you know, though Gaunt was called so; but Gaunt was really a gentleman, and traces his descent back, as we do. I hear nothing but tales of the Pomeroy's. We are descended from kings, we Pomeroy's, so there are many things to tell of us; we are not like common people. You should hear old Naomi Rex talk about us."

"Who is Naomi Rex?"

"She is Bridget's aunt, and she lives in the forest—and when I rode up there on my pretty donkey that Gaunt gave me, she used to come out and feed it with stuff from her garden. You don't know how angry I used to make Bridget, because I would gallop the donkey, and Bridget could not run fast enough to keep up with me. That was when I was little. I have a pony now."



"And does Bridget still run beside you?"

"No: we borrow Jeffs."

"Borrow Jeffs?"

"Jeffs is the lord's coachman, not mamma's; ours is Croft; but mamma likes best to trust me to Jeffs because he is old and steady. Jeffs rides one of the old horses that won't go faster than my pony. I asked Jeffs at first why he would not be mamma's coachman, and he said he should have been hers, only I was a girl and not a boy. We go up to old Naomi's, and she tells me tales of the Pomeroy's—how great and good they were. Mamma will not let me repeat the tales to her, she says she has heard too much of them: but then, you see, mamma is not a true Pomeroy."

"You are a strange child!" involuntarily exclaimed Lady Anna.

"That's because I am a Pomeroy," returned the young lady. "If I want to make mamma angry, I tell her that I am a Pomeroy and she is not. She beat me once for saying it and banished me to the nursery for two days. I did not care: I have the Pomeroy spirit."

"How *can* they have brought the child up like this?" thought Anna, feeling quite dismayed. "And I am sure she would be a sweet child, properly trained."

As the thought passed through Anna's mind, Leolin came up with Mrs. Pomeroy, who had lingered unnecessarily. He introduced them to each other.

"Mrs. Pomeroy," he briefly said. "And this," he added, "is my wife, Lady Anna."

Anna blushed, and put out her hand in cordiality—as it was right to do between connections so near



Mrs. Pomeroy wore the same attire that we last saw her in: the rich black silk, made tight to the throat; the black lace mantilla on her head. Anna was in a light silk; her fair bright hair, worn without ornament, gleaming in the sunlight every time she moved her parasol. It was a very hot day, and neither of them had put on a bonnet. They were quite a contrast: the one looking so gay and bright; the other dark and sombre: even her parasol was black.

Anna, blushing, had put out her hand, her sweet face wearing almost an imploring look, hoping for an answering welcome. To this sensitive-minded girl, the coming to Pomeroy Abbey to supplant Mrs. Pomeroy, had seemed a formidable thing; one she shrank from; and she yearned for a few words of reassuring sympathy. But Mrs. Pomeroy curtsied distantly, and would not meet the hand; would not appear to see it. The child had just spoken of the Pomeroy spirit: one of the Pomeroy frowns rose to the face of the lord.

They stood in silence. An unpleasant silence, resulting from Mrs. Pomeroy's marked discourtesy. Therefore, when a dusty travelling-carriage, drawn by four post-horses, was seen to come in view, as it did at the moment, the diversion it caused served to soften the awkward feeling. From this part of the garden, the approach to the abbey was visible; and this travelling-carriage, its blinds down, had turned off the high road and was sweeping up it. A man servant, wearing mourning, sat on the box, and a very large coat-of-arms was emblazoned on the panels. The eyes of Mary were quick; she was the first to speak.

"The Pomeroy arms! Why it must be Aunt Joan!"

But the eyes of Leolin had expanded with amaze-



ment as he gazed. They were the arms of the *Lords* of Pomeroy, and no living man, but himself, had a right to use them; certainly no living woman, save his wife, *as* his wife. The full arms, with their quarterings, their supporters, and all the rest of the adjuncts, now conspicuous on that travelling-carriage, belonged to the lord alone: the arms used by the other branches of the family were more simple. Mrs. Pomeroy strained her gaze upon the arms, and her face became white as death. She had ceased to use the arms when Guy died: but had her child been a boy instead of a girl, she would have had the right to use them as the young lord's mother.

"It can never be Rupert!" burst from the compressed lips of Leolin, his thoughts flying to the one who ought to have been lord, and was not. "To appear amongst us again, would be to dare his fate—and we could not save him from it."

Anna stole her hand within her husband's. The name of Rupert brought all sorts of dread to her mind. "What would it be—his fate?"

"Death," Leolin mechanically answered, "death by the public verdict. But what idle dream is coming over me?" he continued: "it cannot be Rupert."

Mary Pomeroy laid tight hold of her uncle. "Look at mamma," she said, in a frightened whisper.

He turned, as did his wife; and they hastened to hold Mrs. Pomeroy. Her hands had dropped, her features were drawn and ghastly. The mention of Rupert had frightened her to agony: was he in truth coming home to brave his fate? No one in the world would dare to use those arms, save Rupert.

---



## CHAPTER IV.

## Startling Visitors.

THE carriage, that was causing so much painful speculation, drove in at the large archway, and stopped. A lady, attired in deep mourning—a tall, handsome, right regal looking woman—descended from it, followed by a female attendant and a sick child, a boy of some seven or eight years old. She inquired for Mrs. Pomeroy, and was ushered up the grand staircase.

Mrs. Pomeroy, sitting on a garden bench and faint still, received the message by one of her servants—which message Leolin pressed forward to hear. How greatly both felt relieved it were superfluous to tell. Only a lady: a traveller apparently, who had come to crave speech of her. But where on earth had she picked up that carriage?

Alice proceeded to her reception rooms. The first thing she saw was the child lying on a sofa, his attendant standing near him. The lady rose from her chair at Mrs. Pomeroy's entrance, threw back her crape veil, and they stood face to face.

"Do you know me?" the stranger inquired.

Remembrance was dawning over Alice Pomeroy. Surely it was Sybilla Gaunt, the daughter of Gaunt the gentleman-keeper; she who had left the village nearly eight years before, and with whose good name rumour had made free. There was no mistaking her; those noble features, once seen, could not be forgotten.

"You are Sybilla Gaunt!"



"I was Sybilla Gaunt, years ago. I am Sybilla Pomeroy."

Mrs. Pomeroy froze at once. "What may be the purport of your visit?" she coldly asked.

"I requested to see you privately, as in courtesy bound: and to explain to you why I must from henceforth assume my rights: however sorry I shall be," she added with a bow, "to displace the Lady of Pomeroy."

"I am not the Lady of Pomeroy," sharply interrupted Alice.

"Not in point of fact; I am aware of that: but you have held sway here as such."

"I do not hold it now," interposed Alice, her voice sounding harsher than usual. "It is not I who am Lady of Pomeroy."

"Then who is?—if you will allow me to ask."

"The lord's wife."

"The lord! Of whom do you speak?"

"Of whom should I speak but Leolin?" was the retort. "Leolin is the Lord of Pomeroy."

"Leolin! Surely it is not possible that Leolin has assumed——"

Mrs. Pomeroy would not allow her to go on. Once more came her harsh voice in interruption. Persons who have not been particularly white themselves, generally assume, where they can, to regard others as of the blackest: and very black indeed did Mrs. Pomeroy consider Sybilla Gaunt to be. This was the source of her discourtesy.

"Leolin is the Lord of Pomeroy by right," she haughtily said. "He has no need to *assume* to be."

The visitor approached the sofa. Taking her child



by the hand, she whispered to him: "Rupert dear, can you walk a few steps? Yes, I think you can: I want you to see this lady."

She lovingly lifted him down, and led him up to Mrs. Pomeroy. He was a graceful, aristocratic child, though now fearfully pale and thin: his features were beautiful: he had his mother's expressive, violet eyes, with the long dark lashes; but there was no mistaking that his sire had been a Pomeroy. The visitor held him before her.

"This child," she said, "is the Lord of Pomeroy."

Mrs. Pomeroy, taken by surprise, could neither assent nor refute: but a sudden thought prompted her to speak. "Is it well," haughtily pointing to the servant, "that family discussions should be carried on before a menial?"

"She does not understand a word: she is French. Mrs. Pomeroy, Leolin is not lord, and never has been. The moment the breath went out of my husband's body, his son, this child, became Lord of Pomeroy."

"It is easy to assert a thing," scornfully laughed Mrs. Pomeroy. "George Pomeroy may have made you a tardy reparation—I know not: you will doubtless say so—but this child is seven years old, if he is a day."

"You may have heard of the Gaunt blood," spoke Sybilla calmly; "my father would tell you that it is not less pure than fiery. Can you look at me, and believe that I have ever disgraced it?"

"You left the village to follow George Pomeroy."

"Yes; but, many months before that, I had become George Pomeroy's wife. We were married here. Here, in the chapel attached to the abbey."

"Can this be true?" murmured Mrs. Pomeroy.



"I will not reiterate the assertion," was the proud retort. "It will be easy of proof as your own marriage."

"It was performed in secret?"

"It had to be performed in secret, for certain reasons of my husband's. It was known to none, save the priest who married us, good Father Andrew, and to Rupert."

"Oh! Known to Rupert?"

Disbelief, almost bordering upon scorn, pervaded the tone of the last words. Sybilla quietly corrected it.

"Certainly to Rupert. He was present at the marriage. Later, when George came over to the old lord's funeral, he disclosed the truth to my father and to Guy; and he made all necessary arrangements for my quitting Abbeyland, but I wished to remain in it as long as I could for my father's sake. When I did go, Rupert took me as far as Holyhead, and George received me on the other side. A little later, my boy was born."

"In Ireland?"

"In Ireland. George was quartered there. He afterwards started for India with the regiment. I followed him thither when I was strong enough, taking my child and its nurse. The Indian climate did not agree with the child, and he has not been very strong," she added, glancing fondly at Rupert, who had returned to the distant sofa. "He is nearly eight years old now."

"He is veritably and truly the Lord of Pomeroy?" uttered Mrs. Pomeroy, unable to take in the fact, though she no longer doubted the truth of the story.

"He is as truly the Lord of Pomeroy as anyone



can be, save—save—him who is yet a fugitive. *He* is the veritable Lord of Pomeroy, and will be to his life's end, although he is debarred from enjoying his rights as such."

"I think he must be dead," whispered Mrs. Pomeroy, with quivering lips.

"No, he is not dead," Sybilla was beginning. But she broke off suddenly, her tone changing to coldness. "Let the subject, if you please, be a barred one between us, Mrs. Pomeroy. It is one you may not care to dwell upon; and I will not."

Alice Pomeroy's face deepened to crimson: the next minute it was left paler than before. Her lips trembled.

"I see. You have no more pity for me than others have had. You judge me harshly, as they did. No one stood by me in my bitter trial. In common humanity you must finish the sentence you began. Is he alive?"

"Yes. At least, he was a short while ago. My husband used to have communications from him now and then."

"From himself! By letter! He may be coming back here," added Mrs. Pomeroy in agitation. "He may, not understanding his danger, be wishing to endeavour to assume his rights as Lord of Pomeroy."

"He will never do that," replied Sybilla, her voice inexpressibly sad. "He recognised George as the fitting lord, under the circumstances, and this child as his heir."

That Sybilla in her heart condoned the unhappy Rupert's sins, there appeared to be little room to doubt. Mrs. Pomeroy began to shiver. She often did



when the past was brought unexpectedly before her: and she did not at all forgive Sybilla for bringing it.

"With what object have you returned here?" she resumed pettishly.

"Need you ask—now that you know who I am?" returned Sybilla with quiet dignity. "To bring up my child in the home of his inheritance; and to reside in it of my own right. I am the Lady of Pomeroy."

Mrs. Pomeroy mused. "How will Leolin receive this?—and his wife, Lady Anna? They were married but two days ago. He spoke of her to me just now as the 'Lady of Pomeroy.'"

"I cannot understand it. Notice was sent to Mr. Hildyard that George left a son—who had of course become Lord of Pomeroy. And my father knew it all along. How they can have suffered poor Leolin to assume the inheritance is inexplicable."

"Why did you not come over at once?"

"I came as soon as I could come; as soon as little Rupert's health allowed it. George's own man attended us, bringing his papers and effects. We came by the overland route. In Paris Rupert was again taken ill, and that detained us further. But I saw no cause for any particular haste, knowing of the instructions sent to Mr. Hildyard," concluded Sybilla.

"It will be a blow for Leolin." And Mrs. Pomeroy half laughed as she said it—just as though she enjoyed the blow.

"I am very, very sorry to inflict it—but I have no choice. I would not willingly have come to sow discord: if Leolin will be reasonable, I will be. They may have the grandeur and the sway still, in all but what concerns my boy," added Sybilla.



"Had you any other children?"

"Three," she sighed. "They died in India."

"I know who this one is like," said Mrs. Pomeroy—"like him he is named after. Oh, why did you name him Rupert?" she continued, in a wailing tone of pain.

"We liked the name: and George was always fond of his brother Rupert. Rupert joined us in Ireland, and was at the child's christening. But I must see Leolin."

Mrs. Pomeroy sent a messenger to request Leolin's presence. Strange, perhaps, to say, this astounding news was not unwelcome to her, now she came to revolve it. She disliked Leolin: he had not been sparing of his scorn of herself and her deeds when he came over at Guy's death, and some good-natured listener had repeated to her the words. She had never forgiven Leolin. It would not be too much to say that she hated him: and she would rather it was Sybilla to reign than he.

Leolin, still lingering in the garden with his wife, came up in answer to Mrs. Pomeroy's message, unconscious of the trouble that awaited him. It chanced that the French maid was leading the little boy from the room as he approached it, and they met in the corridor. His notice fell on the child; so sickly-looking, so handsome, so like—it struck Leolin at once—his brother Rupert. Ay, and like George, also.

"Why, who are you?" he exclaimed, stopping before them: and the child lifted his large dark blue eyes and answered courteously.

"I am the Lord of Pomeroy."

Leolin laughed slightly. "Poor child! who has



been playing a farce upon you? Who is this boy?" he repeated to the attendant.

"Plait-il, monsieur?"

Leolin changed his language to hers, which he spoke as a native; as did all the Pomeroy; and repeated the question.

"Monsieur, c'est le Seigneur de Pomeroy."

Turning from them impatiently, he entered the drawing-room, and gazed with amazement at Sybilla, whom he instantly recognized.

"Why, Sybilla! is it you?" he exclaimed. "Have you come back again?"

Mrs. Pomeroy glided up to them. "Leolin, it is the Lady of Pomeroy."

Leolin looked from one to the other with a darkening brow. "The Lady of—what do you say?"

But it was the lady herself—for so we must henceforth call her—who interposed. "Leolin, I am indeed the Lady of Pomeroy; and have been, ever since the fatal night that deprived the abbey of Guy. It was George, you know, to succeed him: Rupert could not."

"Well?" quoth Leolin, wonderingly.

"Well—I was George's wife."

"Wife!" sneered Leolin.

"I was George's wife long before your father died."

"I heard a tale of Sybilla Gaunt's flying from the village with a Pomeroy—after she could no longer stay in it," scoffed Leolin. "But Rupert was indicated as the gallant."

The Lady of Pomeroy confronted him, not giving way to anger, as might have been natural. "I was married to George in the chapel here," she calmly said; "Guy and Rupert became the confidants of the



secret, for my husband saw fit to impart it to them; Rupert at the time, Guy later. I did stay here for many months afterwards; and then I joined my husband in Ireland, where the child was born. Rupert came to us there, and stood godfather to the boy."

"It is a forged, got-up ——"

"Stay, Leolin," she interrupted, stopping what was about to follow. "Are the Gaunts capable of a falsehood—of imposition? Though my father's patrimony and position have been dwindling down for generations, did you ever know him guilty of a dishonourable word or action? He has yielded obedience to the Lords of Pomeroy, almost as a menial, but he is still the self-conscious descendant of the noblest of the land, and I am his daughter. *You know* that I would tell you nothing but truth. If you please to assume that it is not true, send for Father Andrew to confirm what I say. He married us."

Leolin stood confounded: he had no words of refutation at hand.

"I am the Lady of Pomeroy, George's widow," she quietly repeated, "and his child, Rupert, is the lord. I have come back to my fatherland to enter upon my own rights; I have come to the abbey to inhabit it. If I chose to assume my full rights, I should not live in it as the late lord's widow, but as the reigning lady; it can own no other lady than myself, so long as my child, its lord, shall be unmarried. You may perceive that no choice is left me; that for my child's sake I must do this. But, Leolin, I have said to Mrs. Pomeroy——Where is she?"

The lady turned, and Leolin turned. Mrs. Pomeroy, who was at their side a moment before, was no



longer to be seen. She had silently left the room, though they had not noticed her departure.

"I have not come, Leolin, to stir up a whirlwind. I shall not care to fulfil one part of the Lady of Pomeroy's duties—the receiving guests and visiting them. I shall require but limited space in the abbey; but—you understand me—I must be its recognised lady: I am content to live in it quietly, unostentatiously, superintending the education and watching the health of my son. Therefore, though you are not, and cannot be, the abbey's lord, I should yet wish that you would live in it at present as the lord's representative. I should wish that you and your wife—whom I hear you have newly married—should live in it and do its honours, and enjoy a portion of its revenues, which I will take care that you receive: be, in fact, first and foremost, in all but name. Leolin, you will not guess the feeling that prompts me to say this."

He did not ask her to enlighten him; he stood, as before, with compressed lips.

"I will tell you," she said, sinking her voice to a whisper. "So long as *he* lives, he is the true Lord of Pomeroy. He is, Leolin. Though by one wild action, committed in the heat of passion, he may have forfeited the right to reign, he is the true Lord of Pomeroy; in spite of his being compelled to live in exile, poverty, he is yet the chief of Pomeroy. Nor George, nor our child, nor you, had, or can have, a real title to profit by these advantages while he lives ——"

"How can you give utterance to so absurd a theory?" broke out Leolin, with flashing anger.

"I speak as I feel," she quietly said: "I feel that, in spite of what happened, he is the only legitimate



chief of Pomeroy. Had it been premeditated murder, then, I grant you, exile, death, would be too good for him: but, you know what it was—a quarrel; a scuffle. Thus I feel that not one of us has more right to enjoy these advantages than another; nay, that you, as the last of them left, save him, have perhaps the most. It was this feeling, as much as his disinclination to leave the army on the eve of war, that prevented my husband coming home to establish himself at Pomeroy: he felt that the right was but a false right, while his unhappy brother lived. My child is the ostensible lord, and must be, for we cannot put away the laws of succession: but, Leolin, do you and your wife remain in the abbey, and keep up its splendour and its gaiety.”

Still there came no reply from the displaced lord.

“Another thing,” she went on, in a changed tone. “A voice seems to whisper to me that should I assume my full rights here, it might only be to resign them to you on the death of my child. I do not think he will live, Leolin: he was never strong in India, and just before his father died he had fever upon fever, and he has never recovered it. Should he die, as I greatly fear he will, then you are again the Lord of Pomeroy.”

“I must repeat that your feeling towards Rupert is unjustifiable; absurdly high-flown.”

“It is my feeling,” she answered, the blood mantling in her cheeks, “and it was my husband’s before me. When he dies, that poor wanderer and exile, why, then I may wish to take rather more upon myself here than I shall take now; I may perhaps require that Mrs. Pomeroy shall resign to me these state apartments,



which she has continued to occupy. But there is one thing I shall never do, Leolin—and that is, displace you and your wife.”

“The poor exile, as you call him—I should rather say the wicked exile—must be dead long ago.”

“He is not dead, Leolin.”

“Not dead! How do you know it?”

“Because George heard from him just before his own death.”

“Where is he? What is he doing?” asked Leolin, with eager emotion.

“I cannot tell you where he is; I do not know. So far as George and I could gather, he moved about from one desert place to another, avoiding those frequented by civilised man. Once he wrote to us from the depths of some unknown prairie in the Pacific; once from a desert wild in Africa. His whole life is spent in contrivances to hide himself from his fellow men. It must so be spent unto the end.”

Leolin sighed. He and Rupert had been reared together; they had shared the same chamber in infancy, the same studies in boyhood, the same sports as young men: in spite of what had happened they were still brothers; and there were moments when Leolin felt for him most deeply.

“We have been thinking him dead,” he said. “He has never given us the slightest token that he was not, all these years.”

“How could he give it, Leolin? How did he know but that some of you here, in your anger, might seek to bring him to justice? He bound George down to secrecy: I hardly know whether I am justified now in speaking.”



"Absurd! We should not be likely to do that."

"*You* would not. But you cannot answer for Mrs. Pomeroy."

Leolin knitted his brow: as if the name, and the associations it called up, angered him.

"Where did you get that carriage with the lord's coat-of arms?" he abruptly asked, with scant ceremony.

"They are the arms of my child; and his alone. I halted in Paris, for he had there a renewal of his fever. I bought the carriage in Paris, and had the arms placed on it. Leolin, shall it be peace?"

"I don't know what it shall be," roughly returned Leolin, as he turned from the room.

How bitter this blow was to him, he alone knew. In Leolin Pomeroy there had always existed a strong element of selfishness. He was ambitious; fond of state, of position, and of power; fond of money: not for the money in itself, but for the good things it brings. To all this he had attained as Lord of Pomeroy: and to have it dashed from him, at one fell blow, was almost more than human nature could bear. Is it surprising that a strong feeling of resentment against this new Lady of Pomeroy, and against her child—who seemed, both, to have sprung from the other end of the earth or out of the depths of the sea—should have taken possession of him?

In this mood he chanced to meet Father Andrew. The good priest, jolly and equable as ever, was walking about in the sunshine, on the greensward that skirted the approach to the abbey, thinking of nothing in the world but what Marget was providing for his early supper that night, and hoping it would be a dish



of beans and bacon, to which choice delicacy he was particularly partial. He had asked for beans and bacon some days ago, and had not had it yet; Marget—the old-fashioned body who did for him, and who had done for the priest before him—liking to exercise her own opinion in matters. During these agreeable anticipations he found himself suddenly pounced upon by Leolin Pomeroy; who had an awful frown on his face, and laid a fierce grasp on his arm.

“That daughter of John Gaunt—Sybilla. Do you mind me, father?”

“Sure enough I do,” spoke the father.

“She has come back here with a tale that you married her to my brother George.”

“It is a true tale,” replied the priest. “I did marry them.”

“Did it lie in the line of your duty, Father Andrew, to unite Sybilla Gaunt to a Pomeroy?” demanded Leolin in a severe tone.

Nothing put out the good-humoured priest: severity fell harmless upon him. He opened his snuff-box and leisurely helped himself to a pinch.

“You know what the Pomeroy will is: George Pomeroy, goodhearted and gentle though he was, possessed it equally with the rest of you. He did not say to me, Will you marry me? he said, Do it. The licence, and all else, was in order, and I had no choice but to obey.”

“Without the sanction of friends on either side!” was Leolin’s scornful reproach. “Without witnesses?”

“Had there been no witness at all, I might have demurred. Not that any end would have been gained



by it. George would only have taken her off to the next town and got married there. But there was a witness—his brother Rupert. Rupert was present; and, to judge by his manner, heartily sanctioned it. And so she has got back, has she?”

Leolin looked the scorn he did not speak. “Do you know that there is a child?—a boy? She has brought the boy with her, and she calls him the Lord of Pomeroy.”

“I knew there was a boy: born eleven or twelve months after the marriage. Since poor George’s death and your accession, Gaunt and I have sometimes talked over the possible complication——”

“Complication!” wrathfully echoed Leolin. “Was it well, I ask you, father, to conceal so weighty a matter from me?—to let me believe that George left no child?”

“Look here,” said the priest, pleasantly. “We knew about the boy, of course; that he was George’s heir; but he was always so delicate, and of late so ill, his life hanging by a thread, that we deemed it probable he would not live to trouble you. Upon George’s unlooked-for death, Sybilla wrote just a line to her father; it was little more than a line, in her distress; she said that the child was then as ill as he could be, there remained little hope of him; but that all due instructions should be forwarded to Mr. Hildyard. Well, we thought, naturally thought, that Mr. Hildyard, upon receiving these instructions, would acquaint you at once with the fact that there was a little lad who came in as Lord of Pomeroy. Finding that he did not so acquaint you, but, on the contrary, suffered you to enter



on the succession, we supposed Hildyard must have received news that the boy was dead. There it is—lying in a nutshell.”

“Whether he was dead or alive, I ought not to have been kept in this total ignorance. You and Gaunt have both behaved ill to me, father.”

“Nay, nay, my son, not intentionally. In the uncertainty, as to whether the child was alive or dead, we did not care to speak to you; preferring, rather, to leave it until Sybilla’s return, which has long been expected.”

“As to Gaunt’s conduct throughout the whole business, I cannot find words to express my detestation of it. He has played his cards well! It is explained now why he hesitated to give up the stewardship.”

“If you mean that he was a party to the marriage, you are mistaken,” said the priest. “Gaunt knew no more of it, or of what was afoot, than you did. Your father knew of it before Gaunt knew.”

“My father!” exclaimed Leolin, staring at the speaker.

“Ay. I told your father of it on his death-bed. It was, I think, the very day he died. We were talking confidentially, he and I, chiefly about you all, and I saw fit to inform him that I had married George some months before to Sybilla Gaunt. The subject was, in fact, led up to.”

“Did my father, dying though he was, explode with passion?”

“Your father sent his blessing to them. With four sons to marry, he said, one of them might as well choose Sybilla, as not. She was a pure, good girl.”

“Pure! Good!”



"They were the old lord's words: Sybilla was a pure, good girl; of good descent too; he had always liked her, and she would make George a good wife. George had once told him, it seemed, that he should like to choose Sybilla, and the lord had sanctioned the wish. So George was not guilty of even tacit disobedience, you perceive, though he did not at the time disclose the marriage; in fact, George was about the only one of you who, I am sure, could not be guilty of it."

"My father told you this when he was dying?"

"He did. It was his intention to send for Sybilla that day and personally give her his blessing; but death came on too quickly."

"And, with all this approbation—which sounds as though it came out of a romance—will you tell me why it was needful to continue to make a secret of the marriage?" sarcastically asked Leolin. "They might have declared it, as it seems to me."

"I will tell you why they did not," returned the priest. "Your brother George had paid rather too much attention to his colonel's daughter, or she to him: George declared it was the latter, and I think it likely; he was a handsome fellow, you know. He found, to his consternation, that she expected him to ask for her in marriage: but he cared a great deal too much for Sybilla to do that. He told me that he had hastened his marriage with Sybilla, out of sheer fear that Miss Dillon would get a promise from him in some weak moment, and he should find himself compelled to marry her. That's why he kept his marriage a secret—lest it should reach the colonel's ears—for a man, you see, likes to stand well with his colonel."



Miss Dillon went with her father to India, obliging George—as he considered—still to keep the secret: or, at any rate, not to declare it publicly. Most of his brother officers knew it.”

“George was always a coward in some things,” remarked Leolin.

“In what things was he a coward?” rather warmly asked the priest. “George was as brave and good a fellow as ever bent knee to shrine.”

“In the matter of hurting other people’s feelings. I’ve known him walk four miles round, rather than pass the cottage of some ill-doing serf here, whom he had been obliged to blow up. And, witness his never coming home, as lord, out of consideration for that miserable wanderer, Rupert.”

“Ah,” said the priest musingly, a far-off look in his eyes. “But if there were more men like George Pomeroy, the world would be better than it is. I have never known anyone so unselfish.”

Leolin turned back to the house. Father Andrew, solacing himself with another liberal portion of snuff, continued his walk, the far-off look of speculation in his genial eyes. Which speculation might either concern the Pomeroy family, or the problematical treat of bacon and beans.



"In the matter of hurting other people's feelings, I've known him walk four miles round, rather than pass the cottage of some ill-doing scoundrel, whom he had been obliged to blow up. And, witness his never

PRINTING OFFICE OF THE PUBLISHER.

never known anyone so unselfish."





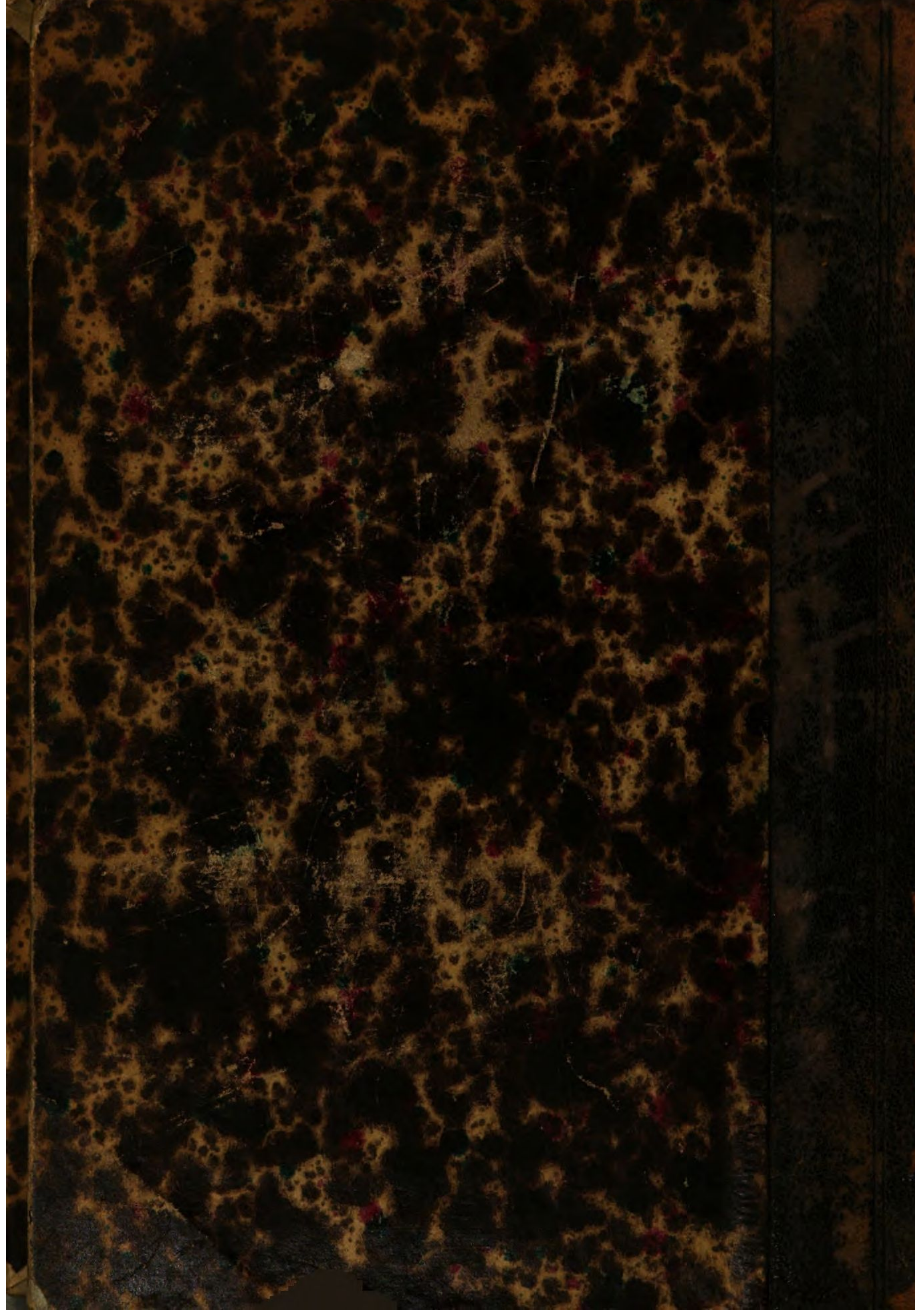






F.X.BEER,  
k.Hofbuchbinder  
MÜNCHEN.  
Ledererstr.25.







Wood, Henry

Pomeroy Abbey a romance ; in two volumes

Bd.: 1

Leipzig 1878

P.o.angl. 471 b-52

urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb11376969-0